

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय

SANTINIKETAN
VISWA BHARATI
LIBRARY

843 (T)

C 81

FOR ME ALONE

(*POUR MOI SEULE*)

A NOVEL

BY

ANDRÉ CORTHIS

*Translated from the French by
Frederick Taber Cooper*



LONDON : GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD.
RUSKIN HOUSE, 40 MUSEUM STREET, W.C. 1

First published in Great Britain, 1921

Copyright in U.S.A.

(All rights reserved)

FOR ME ALONE

CHAPTER I

ABOVE the roof of red tiles that I see from my window, the smoke is struggling to rise, but is beaten down by a strong wind. It bubbles up as it leaves the blackened chimney like a feeble jet of water; it settles back, then mounts again. As I watch it, I think of many things that I should hardly know how to say. Not but what I have been well taught. I attended school in Paris. I still do some reading. And I have always been told that I write a good letter. But it is hard to know just what one feels and to put it into exact words.

Nevertheless, I should like to make the attempt. The days are long, and my sister Guicharde relieves me of the whole care of the house. At this very moment (to-day is Saturday), she is busy downstairs changing the blue papers on the pantry shelves. She is brisk in her movements, and the dishes as she shifts them, rattle together with a clatter that would greatly distress my husband,

a much better housekeeper than I, and perhaps ought to perturb me, too.

Alone in my bedroom, in front of this paper that I have just laid out, I find myself "plain stupid," as they say down here. Yet what is there for me to write, since nothing whatever has happened, excepting what has happened within myself? All the same, I am going to try. . . . It will be quite commonplace, no doubt, and awkwardly expressed, but no one will be able to laugh at it, since only the flames will ever see these pages, with their blue-ruled squares, after my writing has covered them.

Our house is cold and sombre, with only one upper story, and three large attics. There is no garden. In the rear only a court separates us from the unused chapel of an old convent; a sickly acacia tree struggles to maintain its feeble life. Its swaying branches touch our windows and reach out on the other side clear to the little blue and yellow panes; its blossoms, faded almost before they open, yet nevertheless fragrant, are strewn with equal abundance in the springtime over our own roof with its big dormer windows, and the oval roof still surmounted by the bell and the cross. There is no view from this side, and none from the street side either, for the street is too narrow. It is called the Street of the Massacres, in memory of the horrible things which happened

there during the religious wars. . . . But that is not the way I ought to begin.

It is five years since I first came to this town, and it is four years since I was married and have been living in this house. During the first days. . . .

No, that is not the right way either. Am I ever going to get started? Presently they will call me down to supper, and I shall not have as much as four lines written. What I need is my opening phrase; the rest will come quite easily. Ah! now I have it: This is what really stands for me as the beginning of everything:

As long as I live I shall remember the day when Mamma told us the story of her life.

*

* *

We were still living in Paris at that time, for my father had been dead only a few months and we had stayed on in the neat but gloomy little apartment on the Rue des Feuillantines where I had always lived. A shimmer of green, interspersed with gold, floated like a haze through the branches of the distant trees where the first leaves of spring were budding. I stood leaning from the open window, watching them; then I looked up at the sky, vaguely blue behind its grey veil that was fast thinning and about to break away; and all at once I said:

"Mamma, if we go to the country this year, why can't we go down to your old home?"

"Close the window, Alvère," said Mamma. "I am catching cold, and you will have a chill."

"But it isn't cold any longer; it is springtime."

However, I obeyed. Guicharde was busy at the table with a pair of squeaky scissors, cutting out a waist from black cloth. We were in the dining-room, where our days were spent, for we had no sitting-room, and our two bedrooms were small and dark. I can remember the poor bits of furniture that we finally had to sell, for they were not worth the cost of transportation: my father's desk, in one corner, with his letter paper and account books, six chairs with leather so old and worn that it had begun to turn white, and the little set of shelves beside the low buffet, where the old newspapers were carefully piled, along with some empty boxes which had once held groceries or wearing apparel, and being quite clean might serve again some day.

"I should dearly love to visit your little old home, Mamma. I dreamed last night of the three fig trees around the fountain, and of the terraced kitchen garden from which you can look across the whole width of the Rhone valley and see the Alps in the distance, when the air is very clear after heavy rains."

"With our poor little income," said Guicharde,

"we could live better down there than in Paris. I had to pay four francs for eggs this morning, and we shall have no dessert for dinner, because the chestnuts are at an end, and the price of jam has gone up again."

"Dear me!" sighed Mamma. "No doubt it would be better. Yes, it would be better —"

Yet she shook her head. The keen distress that rose from her aching heart to her perturbed face set each separate muscle quivering and twitching under the thin, pale skin. Tears rose to her eyes, which even yet retained their beauty.

"It would be better, and I often tell myself so. But I dare not go back down yonder. I could not bear to see *them* again. *They* treated him too badly. *They* caused me too much pain."

We knew that she was speaking of our father's parents. We knew that our life of poverty was due to the unjust anger they had felt at seeing a son of theirs marry a girl not only poor but little removed by birth from the working class. And without ever having seen them, how we hated them, those Landargues of Saint-Jacques, directors of the great Saint-Jacques stone quarries on the banks of the Rhone, where my father ought to have grown rich in his turn, as every son of that family had grown rich for more than two hundred years. Nevertheless we had no dread of a chance encounter with them. Guicharde, who could hold

a grudge and was not timid, looked forward to the insolent pleasure of staring them straight in the face and then turning her head away with a scornful curl of the lip; while for my part I did not consider them of sufficient importance to be worth the sacrifice we were making, by not occupying the house which had come to us from Mamma's parents, and would cost us nothing in rent.

"But really," said my sister, interrupting her work and seating herself on the edge of the table, "it seems to me the time has come to do something decisive. Why should we insist upon remaining here, and what have we to regret in leaving Paris? We never see a soul, we never allow ourselves any pleasure, and we certainly live poorly enough, notwithstanding that we spend a great deal of money on our food."

"That is true," said Mamma with another sigh, "only too true."

Here I urged in my turn:

"The garden would keep us supplied with vegetables. We could wear cloth shoes with hemp soles, which cost very little. And the good air of Lagarde would do us all a world of good!"

"Yes, yes," said Mamma, "the air is good—but that is more than can be said of the people."

"How absurd!" exclaimed Guicharde, "how

perfectly absurd! For, after all, the Landargues are not the whole neighbourhood."

"But," said Mamma — and never had she seemed to me so humble and dissipated — "It is not only the Landargues, it is the whole neighbourhood that I dread."

"The whole neighbourhood!" repeated Guicharde — and since she was always violent in her emotions, she was not at this moment merely surprised but stupefied — "You dread the whole neighbourhood! Why should you?"

"Because you had already been in the world several years when I was first married, my daughter, and down yonder everybody knows it."

Mamma said this without lowering her voice. ✓ She had guarded her secret too long, and now she let it escape her before us, quite simply, because the heart opens of its own accord just as the hands do when they are too weary, and no amount of will power can longer keep them closed. She did not seem perturbed by the silence which followed her words, and the little sigh she gave was almost one of relief. I gazed at her, and in that second, recalling all the severity of our girlhood training, the forbidden books, the straight-combed hair, the high-sounding and imperious maxims regarding feminine honour, I felt, I really believe, more bewildered than distressed, and was at a loss to understand. But Guicharde

was ten years older than I. She softly laid down her scissors; one would have said that she was listening to something — and surely there must have rung in her ears the echo of all the anguish which in earlier days had overwhelmed our mother. For suddenly she flung herself upon her, enveloped her in both arms, and dropping upon her knees, she murmured, "Oh, Mamma! Poor, poor Mamma!" in a tone of tenderness never before heard from her rather harsh voice.

*

* *

Mamma leaned her head on Guicharde's shoulder and let herself be fondled. In the silence which followed I heard the rumble of a slow and heavy wagon along the pavement of our street. A whip snapped blithely, but evidently did not touch the horses; it merely served as an enticing rhythm to overcome their fatigue. The window had remained open. A light breeze gently stirred the cloth which Guicharde had just been cutting.

"You see," began Mamma in a dreamy, reminiscent tone, quite happy and without self-consciousness, "when I entered the office to keep some of the accounts, they were all very nice to me. Father Landargues was still living at that time; but he had hardly anything to do with the business, and he died soon after. Then there was Mme. Landargues who supervised everything.

"Mamma," Guicharde kept murmuring, each time that she paused, still holding her tight clasped, like a child, and touching her cheek with her lips, "dear little Mamma."

"Oh, my great big daughter . . . if you only knew . . . the shame of it . . . how it hurts," like the hurt of a cut or a burn, just as bad as that, only it never heals. Well, then, we came to Paris, and lived at first in one little room, almost beggarly, it was so small. Georges was determined not to ask his parents for a single sou, because the things they had said of us both were too abominable. He found employment, but the only line he knew was stone quarries and how to superintend two or three hundred workmen. He knew nothing about textiles, and quite as little about porcelains or furniture. He tried each of these in turn. He could not earn much. Then a winter came when we were desperately in need. He wrote to his mother. She replied, 'If you will renounce your rights to inherit your share of my estate, which you no longer deserve, and if I never need to hear your name again, I am willing to give you one hundred thousand francs.' Naturally, he renounced all rights. . . . A hundred thousand francs . . . think of it. . . ."

"All the same —" began Guicharde, who had a practical mind.

"Ah, you don't know the state we had come to!

Thanks to those hundred thousand francs, we were quite happy for several months. Georges kept saying to me, 'I am waiting for a good business opening, where I can go in as partner. I am no good as a clerk, I never had the right training for one. But as member of a firm, well, you shall see.' He did find an opening, only it was a bad one, and the hundred thousand francs came near to being all lost. We managed to save about half; but we had been so badly frightened — oh, so frightened! — that we were not willing to take any further risks. We invested what was left in Government bonds so as to have peace of mind, and your father found a humble place as cashier at Marpeau's, where he stayed for more than twenty years, until his death."

We knew some of these details already, but even the most familiar had to-day the appeal of the unknown, and we listened to the whole new story in sad amazement, in sad wonderment and agitation.

Guicharde lowered her voice to ask:

"And then, Mamma . . . you were married?"

"It was this way," she answered. "It was after my father died. He had refused to see me again, and I was very unhappy . . . Georges — he was so gentle, and a little timid too — like me! — he was always hoping that his mother would

forgive us and consent to our marriage. Since he had been very strictly brought up, he could not make up his mind to dispense with her consent. He used to tell me so, and I quite understood. But he ended by recognising that her hatred would last for life and that nothing he might do could make her anger any greater. So, one day, after we had talked it all over, we went together to the Mayor's office and to the church, without saying a word to any one. Since I was already known in Paris as Mme. Landargues, it changed nothing; but you must remember, Guicharde? It was the morning we brought you the pretty doll with the pink dress, and there was a cake for dessert, all covered with icing and candied fruits."

"Why, yes," said Guicharde, "I remember quite well . . . I was so pleased! . . . Ah! so that was the reason for the cake and the doll! . . . How little we understand when we are children."

Mamma straightened herself in her arm chair, and looked out through the window at the sky and those ugly grey roofs that were beginning to turn a leaden blue.

"So that's how it was," she said again, "that's how . . . You understand now, my dears, why I brought you up the way I did. Two hours every morning at a little private school in our own district. And I took you there myself and came for

you. It was education enough, since I did not intend that you should ever do any work, which would have taken you away from me . . . Ah, no! I was too much afraid. In all those houses where they employ young girls, in all those offices, it is my own story beginning over again . . . No! No! I would not have it. I preferred that you should never earn money, I preferred our poverty, so long as I could keep you here, close beside me always. So, if I have seen danger in everything, in girl friends, in books, in theatres, even in the city streets, if you always found life rather dull, you understand now why you mustn't blame me."

She had never been able to put what she felt into fine phrases, nor did she expect us to do so. But I think that for a long time she had felt a great longing to put an end to false pretences and, already on the threshold of old age, to trust herself, weary and enfeebled, to our hands. She pressed herself against Guicharde, and now and then against me too, with a touching and reassured confidence. And when, a little later, on that same day, my sister, in her wisdom, decided that such a very distant past, followed by so many honourable years, could not really be an obstacle to organising our life according to common-sense and economy, she at once approved, with docile resignation.

CHAPTER II

THE house of my grandfather the carpenter was in the very heart of the old, old town. Other houses crowded around it; its roof merged with other higher or lower roofs. On the night of our arrival, as we came out of the little station, when Mamma stretched out her arm and said, "There it is!" we saw nothing at first, along the side of the hill, but a rising jumble of roofs the hue of burnt-almond, surmounting little walls, rust-red or honey-coloured. The square belfry of the church bore aloft its largest bell, within a fine turret of wrought iron, open on every side to the sky; and all the house chimneys reached up towards it, each surmounted by two bricks, sloping and touching at their upper ends, like the stiff fingers of saints at prayer in primitive sculptures and paintings of olden times.

It was the end of April, and with a sharp wind blowing, it was still cold. Night shut down during the time it took us to accomplish our uphill journey. Through little streets that turned and twisted under archways, across little squares that vaunted their one big elm and three acacias, we

reached the alley on which our house faced. Here a stronger wind struck us, tearing the lungs like a knife. Our fingers were breaking with the weight of our valises, bound with cord, and the great moleskin bag that had held our provisions for the journey and was weighted down with glasses and bottles that clattered and jingled as they danced together. And no one was there to meet us but a fifteen-year-old maid servant whom Guicharde had engaged two weeks in advance through the Mayor's office, to put the simple house in order.

We had to knock three times before the maid at last made up her mind to open the door. She was a stupid but good-natured looking girl, with a bust already firm and well developed within her pink-striped bodice, and imitation emeralds in copper settings dangled from her ears. At sight of us she remained on the door-sill, laughing inanely, without even thinking of offering to relieve us. But already, in the other houses, curtains were being raised behind the greenish panes of the little windows; a door was partly opened; some one leaned down towards us from a balcony; a voice whispered:

"It's Georges Landargues' widow and her two daughters!"

"Oh, go in," said Mamma, "let us go in quickly!"

And she crossed the threshold, rigid, almost

violent in her movements, with something like the courage of desperation. But Guicharde remained behind her on the door-sill; staring up at those windows behind which there lurked so much malevolent curiosity, and it pleased me to imagine that her hard, bold glance forced those other unseen glances to turn aside, behind those faded curtains. Then she in her turn entered, and the little maid closed the door. I said in a low tone:

"We have come home."

My glance took in the hallway, half filled by the wooden staircase, with two open doors leading, the one on the left to the parlour lit by a smoky lamp with a yellow shade, the one on the right to the kitchen where some small logs were blazing in a wide black fire-place. Guicharde was already busy, turning up the lamp-wicks, opening the closets, worrying as to how our trunks, which were expected to arrive the next day, could ever be carried up the narrow stairway. Mamma was silent. It seemed to me that she had bowed her head and bent her shoulders lower than ever. She approached one of the windows, which opened onto the garden, and gazed out into the night. She was trembling softly. Perhaps she was thinking of those other curtains that were raised at her arrival, and perhaps the whisperings which at that moment were going on within those darkened houses penetrated even to her.

"I ought never to have come back here," she said.

"But since it was impossible to do anything else," remarked Guicharde with her somewhat brusque common-sense. And she called for another candle, to light her way to the bedrooms.

Mamma sighed: "That is true!"

She seated herself resignedly at the table where the cloth had been laid. She had taken off her black jacket trimmed with imitation astrachan, but she still wore her little crepe hat, which was all mis-shapen and awry from the journey. I called her attention to it.

"Take it off, Mamma. One would think that you were not in your own home, but were preparing to start off again."

She at once obeyed with gentle tranquillity.

"It is true, all the same," she said, "that I am at home. . . . Here I am back again, in my own house."

She showed me, in one corner, a low-seated cane chair, whose plain back had for sole ornamentation a carving in relief of three bees within a garland of olive leaves.

"You see, that is where I used to sit when I was a little, little girl."

And she showed me besides, near the window, a square polished table, with twisted legs, that glistened in the lamp-light.

"That is where I wrote my exercises; that is where I earned my school diploma. And afterwards I studied book-keeping there. Uncle Jarny taught me. He had been cashier in Paris, in a big textile house."

She paused and again looked out of the window; and what she saw now, I knew quite well, lay behind and beyond furniture and walls. . . . Her sadness at this moment penetrated me with something akin to despair. Her poor heart was bleeding, and my own heart wept in sympathy, as I gently stroked her small, pale hand. But Guicharde now entered with hasty strides. Speaking of trunks, she declared:

"There is just room for them to pass, but the man will have to be careful not to scratch the walls."

Behind her came the maid, Adélaïde, carrying the soup-tureen, and we seated ourselves for our first meal. We were none of us very hungry. The lamp continued to smoke and to give a bad light. Mingled with the odour of the uneven wick we became aware of the humid, mouldy odour of old stone and plaster, kept too long in shadow. The high wind, raging against the outer walls of our humble home, seemed to threaten to lay it prostrate. Its shrill blasts were like the snapping of whips, whose lashes seemed to fall upon our beating hearts. For brief moments it seemed

to abate. But these silences caused us an even greater oppression, for we knew well that the wind was still there, brooding over the house, enveloping it with its might, ready to spring and howl anew when it had taken its ominous repose. By this time fatigue oppressed us to the point that we could no longer speak. And still we felt constrained to do so, for silence had become so unbearable that we were on the point of sobbing aloud.

"You will see to-morrow," said Mamma, "how fine the view is."

And she talked on, feverishly agitated by the sense of shame which her return had reawakened, keen as ever after thirty years; and her fears and hopes for us, out of all possible joys and sorrows, centred in the good or the ill that could come to us from the formidable judgment of the neighbours.

"Your life henceforth must be so proper and reserved that no one can ever find ground for a word against you. It is quite certain that no one here will ever dream of marrying you. So you need not be apprehensive about the young men. You will have few pleasures, my poor children, but if you can eventually secure the respect that I would have been so thankful to keep, you will be very fortunate in spite of everything."

In this strain, both by her words and by the

horror inspired by her own sad case, she was ceaselessly preaching wisdom to us. And I well understood that the prudent strictness according to which our whole life had been regulated since childhood would, in this narrow town, draw a tighter rein daily around my scruples and my docility.

*

* *

The first days at Lagarde were not as sad as we might have apprehended. All our windows looked out upon the open country, and we had the beautiful landscape always before our eyes. One source of keen enjoyment was our garden, which overhung the plain and from which we looked down on the high-road, and upon the Rhone a little further off, and the long range of sun-baked hillside, that changed colour every hour of the day. And finally, the welcome we received from the trades-people and the modest social circle in which Mamma's mother had moved, while tinged with curiosity, was not in the least hostile. As Guicharde had said, the whole sad story was a long way back, and so many dignified years had intervened!

Mamma, however, preferred to keep to the house. She formed the habit of going out only on Sundays, to attend early Mass, for appearance' sake, since she had little religion left. Guicharde,

who had promptly taken over the management of the house, deciding everything with wise efficiency, went to market every morning, accompanied by our little maid, but rarely walked abroad at other times. So I was left to go by myself to explore the town, disdaining the new streets, the white Town-hall, the schoolhouse with its shining windows, and keeping, instead, to the old quarter, with its narrow pavements, discovering palaces once inhabited by Cardinals and Captains, whose fine, sonorous names even the poorest of the townsfolk could tell me; narrow back-streets with arching doorways, ornamented with a crumbling acanthus or a sculptured head, from which the lips had been ravished by corroding time; quaint open squares; and wrought iron balconies bearing in their scroll-work initials or heraldic devices. Once, however, I went the whole length of the town, and passed the Clock-tower, which belongs to the Landargues, and saw through grilled gates, trees and flowers, the long, high-storied dwelling which I was destined never to enter. Another time, on the highway, Mme. Landargues, my grandmother, passed close by me in her low carriage, drawn by two white horses. I saw her snow-white hair, her hard eyes, her face veil . . . And these were the sole events of my life at Lagarde, until the day when, for the first time, I encountered my cousin, François Landargues.

CHAPTER III

I HAD sometimes seen him at a distance, walking on the main street or along the bank of the Rhone; I had been told who he was, and I knew him by sight; but it was not until four months after our arrival that I first spoke with him, in the public square, the day of the fair. Beside the fountain a lopped-off plane tree left a gap for the sun, and the sparkling water was too dazzling for the eye to bear; but all around, the fine trees interlaced their abundant foliage; and here on little benches or piled-up bags sat the women who sold vegetables, with their tempting baskets arrayed before them. A little further off, the itinerant vendors had pitched their tents and set up their counters. Pink and blue petticoats, striped, plaid and beflowered bodices, serviceable shirts, violent hued ribbons, buckled girdles bedecked the gay, enticing trays, motionless in the sluggish air, satiated, so it seemed, with heat and summer sunshine. There were also for sale necklaces and brooches, shoes with leather or cord soles, scissors, perfumery . . . I crossed the market place, amid the dancing shadows, for a slight breeze had risen and was stirring in the

thick leafage. There were so many people, and all in such a hurry that no one that day was paying attention to the daughter of Georges Landargues, who was usually the source of so much curiosity. I can still see just how she looked that morning as she made her way clad in a plaid dress, with a simple round hat. She does not seem to me to have been myself. She has not become what I am to-day. And often, despite the years which have passed, it seems to me that she must still be there, in the sunshine of a July morning, in the midst of a great crowd of people who jostled and scorned her, and that, to the days of old age, to the day of my death, she will remain like that, timid, marvelling at the fine summer day, and with heart beating in expectation of what life will bring.

Among all these merchants, some came from the North and others from Alsace, and still others from a remoter South than our own. I even found one who had come from Spain and who urged me to buy his laces. I drew nearer to him, not with the intention of buying anything — for all I had in my purse was two francs that Guicharde had given me to get a little wicker basket from a gypsy woman who had a stand down by the bridge; but it amused me to watch those fine, wide laces swaying from the cords to which they were suspended by pins or wooden clamps. The man was swarthy, with handsome eyes, and in his

FOR ME ALSO

eager, persuasive phrases an old Provençal was blended in a mesh with the thronging words of Mamma. Near him stood a little woman who coiled high on her head, and in her heavy silver rings. The wagon brought them on their long journey, them, its square windows showing with drawn back with red ribbons. In fancy this wagon recrossing that distant from a fine evening and returning towards the tinged villages of a sun-parched land where verdure springs . . .

At that moment the crowd swept a young woman, who lived in the lower part of the town, and whose name was Julie. She was far from sedate in manner, and wore showy hats that set off to advantage her dazzling hair; and Mamma had advised me always to turn my head away when I passed anywhere near her. So I took a step forward, intending to put a distance between us, when she slipped in behind me, and I heard her say, as if in reply to some one else:

"Oh, come, François, you are joking! You know very well that you are not to make me any more presents. Instead, why don't you offer these laces to your little cousin, Alvère Landargues, who has been examining them most attentively."

LONE

to my ear that I could
ning around. I heard
beat a hasty retreat,
their of the Landargues
dson of my arrogant
François. He was
and dressed in perfect taste.
Health was bad, like that of his
him; yet now that I could examine
range, I was none the less astonished
that his pallid, close-shaven features were
scanned with wrinkles. The rather
arrogance in the curve
business in the lines at the cor-
downward. His vague,
harder to characterise. Yet
the whole said no means unagreeable.

I believ  that we were both about equally annoyed at the way in which we had just been introduced by that madcap, Julie B raud; but after exchanging a second glance, it became impossible to go our separate ways without speaking. Fran ois Landargues, who naturally had more self-possession than I, spoke first:

"Well, little Cousin," he remarked with easy affability, "aren't we going to say 'how do you do?' to each other?"

I returned, between compressed lips, "How-do-you-do?"

He continued politely:

"Is my Aunt Georges in good health? And your sister?"

"They are both quite well, thank you."

Two women, coming up to buy lace, crowded me toward the middle of the Square, where there is more free room for locomotion. In my embarrassment I found it easier to keep moving, and François Landargues continued to walk beside me.

"You have been here for two months, I believe?"

"Four months."

"You are spending the summer?"

"No, we have come to stay."

He expressed surprise:

"To stay? . . . At your age? . . . How bored you are going to be!"

He looked me over more attentively and with less discretion. He studied the details of my figure and my separate features.

"I am glad we have become acquainted, aren't you? It has been very pleasant to me. And I hope that we shall meet again quite soon."

At that moment Dr. Fabien Gourdon — whom I had not yet met, and who is to-day my husband — was crossing the Square with a friend. I learned later that this friend remarked:

"She isn't really so bad-looking, that little Landargues girl, poor Georges' daughter."

"Have I ever met her?" asked Fabien Gourdon disdainfully. "If I ever have, I didn't even look at her."

"François Landargues is not so contemptuous. He is not only looking at her, but talking to her, and what is more, seems to be enjoying himself."

"Does Monsieur François Landargues permit himself to talk to those women?" asked the Doctor in tones of astonishment. And I learned later that in spite of the fact that he was too far off to form any real judgment of me, he promptly added:

"You are quite right, she is charming. But Monsieur François always has such good taste."

*

* *

Guicharde was enraged when she heard of this encounter; but Mamma, after a first exclamation, did not utter another word. During luncheon she was so absent-minded that she cut herself three slices of bread, leaving the pieces lying untouched before her. A little later, having to write an order for a load of wood, she remained sitting at her writing desk for more than an hour, because the slight thought required for that task was jostled in her mind and elbowed aside by other thoughts. And in the course of the day, taking advantage of a moment when my sister was absent she came out on the terrace and sat down beside

me. I was busy with my lace-work, practising the only craft that had ever been taught me, and weaving delicate points of old Flemish, with sixty wooden bobbins.

"Tell me," demanded Mamma, after at least five minutes' hesitation, "is it really true that he spoke of me with politeness, and asked about my health?"

She had no need to mention names. I twisted four threads, thrust in a pin at their crossing point, and was then able to answer calmly:

"Why, yes, Mamma, it is quite true, I assure you."

"It is astonishing!" she said.

And I saw that, despite all her efforts to seem indifferent, a glow of proud satisfaction overspread her features.

A little later, notwithstanding that the silence between us had endured long enough for her to have shifted her thoughts to other matters, she asked again:

"And . . . you are quite sure that in speaking of me he didn't say 'your mother' or 'Madame Georges,' but that he really said 'my aunt'?"

"Absolutely sure. It surprised me . . . and yet at the same time . . ."

"Yes," she said, "it did please you, didn't it? Oh! . . . and besides . . ."

Quite happily she drew her chair up beside mine.

"He is very simple, you know, and quite attractive. I am sure he would like to be nice to us, if it were not for his grandmother. I remember that, as a child, he used to laugh up at me when I met him in the Square; and when I became a widow, I know that he wanted to write to me, only Mme. Landargues forbade him. He is very well liked through the whole district. The people speak of him the same way they used to speak of your father. That is to say, not quite the same . . . you understand . . . My Georges was even more simple . . . but still . . ."

Now that she had spoken to me so openly, I ventured to say:

"I thought he was nice."

She did not seem in the least shocked at this frank opinion.

"If you meet him again, be agreeable to him, my daughter. Of course, you don't want to seem to be running after him. One must keep one's dignity. But neither is there any need of being stand-offish. If he bows to you, answer with a little smile; if he wants to stop and speak with you, then stop and speak — don't pass him by with the air of one holding the whole world in contempt. I certainly shall not make advances to the Landargues, but if they wish to make up with us it would be bad policy to turn our backs on them."

Little words uttered by Mamma, poor, ingenu-

ous words, and full of imprudence, what encouragement you gave to what I already secretly desired! And how well I remember, mingling with the troubled joy of that evening, the odour of the poor struggling hyacinths that formed a flowering border to our bed of chard and cabbages!

*

* *

On the Sunday following the the day of the fair, I pleaded that I was too tired to rise in time to attend seven o'clock Mass. My fatigue was a fiction; but what Mamma had said was enough to save me from a troubled conscience. François Landargues usually attended High Mass; and had it not become a sort of family duty for me to make an opportunity for seeing François Landargues again? Accordingly, I did see him again; and I also saw my grandmother, Mme. Landargues.

She was an old, old woman, yet still strikingly handsome without being attractive, with her dazzling white hair of which Mamma had spoken, the straight, compressed mouth, the unkind eyes. My whole heart rebelled against her more violently than ever before. François kept close to her side, giving all his attention to supporting her steps. In the confusion of passing out from church, he seemed not to perceive me, and failed to bow. Full of humiliation, I returned home by the unfrequented Rue de la Tête-Noir and Rue des

Quatre-Vents, despising myself quite as thoroughly as my haughty cousin could have done. I now deemed myself so silly as to be quite insufferable. My entire consciousness, my whole inmost self was possessed by an irritation so keen that it hurt, and I could not form a single thought in my secret heart that did not sear me like a red-hot brand. Even the decision to concern myself no further with François Landargues brought no alleviation. Perhaps that is why I did not adhere to it.

At all events, I did not again attend High Mass on any of the following Sundays. But if some one had to go for a basket of strawberries or plums to Orpise's fertile fruit-garden, situated on the Quarry Road, I never allowed all that trouble to fall to Guicharde or to Adélaïde. And I lingered no doubt longer than was necessary at the green-grocery, listening to the gossip of the proprietress. Before her door the ascending road is furrowed by the wheels of the quarry wagons. In the sun-baked ruts of summer, here and there crushed and reduced to dust, it often happened that among the heavy imprints left by the big draft horses a more slender set of hoofs had here and there left their lighter marks. "Evidently," I told myself, "when François Landargues goes to the Quarries he rides in a carriage, and he rides in a carriage when he comes back." And I strained my ears,

fancying that I could hear the patter of those slender hoofs, behind the intervening holm-oaks with their black, gnarled trunks. How well I remember! And I remember besides, how often I used to go for a walk in the woods at La Chartreuse, where the Landargues owned several dozen acres, planted with acacias and English oaks, in the midst of which is an isolated lodge occupied by the forest warden. I used to go there alone, and wander at leisure. The earth gleamed red beneath the tough and sombre leafage of stunted trees and close-packed undergrowth. Presently I would reach the round, secluded valley, in the depths of which reposes the old Carthusian Monastery in all the mystery of its abandonment. There I would seat myself on some fallen tree trunk and gaze down below me at those little regular cells, with their roofs of enamelled tiles, brown or blue, glistening like the burnished breasts of pigeons; and at the abandoned gardens, filled to overflowing with wild woodland growth, and unable to make up my mind to return home just yet, I would keep repeating, "How good it feels to breathe this air!"—trying to justify myself for lingering.

CHAPTER IV

MY next meeting with François Landargues, however, was destined to be neither on the Quarry Road nor in the woods of La Chartreuse, but on a day when, as it happened, I was not thinking of him at all, in the silent, unfrequented Place Ronde, about which the Canons' residences are grouped. He had just come out of one of these houses, one that now stood empty but in which, as I happened to know, Mme. Landargues had been born and had passed her childhood. Above the wooden portal, painted brown, and pierced with a peep-hole, the stones of the wall rose in the form of a Roman arch. The wrought-iron lock, very old and very black, was held in place by hand-wrought nails with faceted heads. François Landargues turned a huge key in this lock; then drawing it out, but still holding it in his hand, doubtless rather than stretch the pocket of his suit of fine grey cloth, he turned around and found himself face to face with me.

I saw plainly, as his hand went automatically toward his hat, that his first impulse was merely to bow and pass on. However, after giving me an

intent look, and smiling to see that I was blushing, he decided to stop, and greeted me with easy familiarity:

"Good morning, little Cousin," he said; adding as he extended his hand, "come, we are friends now, won't you shake hands?"

I obeyed. François smiled again. There was something in his smile which attracted and repelled at the same time; there was a blending of satisfaction and disdain, an irony without kindliness, which formed the fundamental trait of his nature, and with it a sick man's melancholy which was none the less sincere. To-day as I reinvoke that smile in my memory, which has faithfully retained it, I believe that I can explain it; but I also know that at the moment I failed to understand it, and that in passing over me it reduced my poor little thoughts to utter confusion.

"Let's profit by this second encounter to become a little better acquainted. Don't you want to? Come and sit down on the bench under the old elm; not a soul will see us. The Place is deserted; the Canons are busy at their devotions, and if their servants are at this moment spying on us from behind those grilled windows, why, the worthy women repeat so many things that no one heeds them any more."

Because of the deep rupture between our two families, he was perhaps more deeply concerned at

this moment than even I was as to what people might say. But, having drawn reassurance from his own reassuring words, he repeated:

"Come."

A circular bench surrounded the enormous, three-hundred-year-old elm, which it had been necessary to girdle with iron in order to prevent its hollow and gaping shell from splitting asunder and dooming it to die. François seated himself, but I chose to remain standing before him. He pierced me through with one of his sharp glances, and having sought and promptly found the words most likely to grip my attention, he declared:

"I have spoken of you to my grandmother."

This did indeed touch me keenly, for it wounded me — chiefly, I think, because, while he took advantage of our relationship to treat me with so much familiarity, he nevertheless stopped short of saying "our" grandmother. My lips grew rigid; I stared fixedly at a little yellow flower, pushing up between two stones on the opposite side of the Place Ronde.

"That vexes you! Why should it?"

He took my hand again. His own was hot and thin and parched, and his caressing fingers slid down over my wrist. I was at a loss, for the moment, how to free myself.

"Why are you vexed? Of course, I know how harsh my grandmother has been towards your

people. But she is very old now. You ought to understand and forgive."

Had she asked us to? I could not prevent this hope from dawning in my eyes, and I am very sure to-day that François read my eyes and was amused.

"You ought . . . yes, really, you ought . . . some day, later on. But for the moment, at the first words I spoke regarding our meeting, she became so angry that I dared not continue."

In that case, what was his object in speaking of her to me? I think that I was on the point of asking him this; but at that very moment, from one of the houses on the Rue des Massacres — the house in which I now live — a man came out and turned up in our direction. It was Dr. Fabien Gourdon.

I had already met him several times, in the public Square, or on the side streets, without paying any more attention to his personal appearance than he had paid to mine; and even this time I noticed merely his broad, swarthy, somewhat heavy features, which even his black beard, neatly trimmed to a point, failed to refine; and his manner of walking, which showed a studied self-assurance rather than the confidence born of perfect ease. He was dressed with elaborate care: a sporting suit of brown duck, with a belt drawn tightly in at the waist; and the gaiters he wore over his stout walking boots were too fine, of a

leather too new, too yellow and too shiny. He was already close upon us when, without smiling or bowing, he drew himself more stiffly erect, planted his feet more forcefully on the ground, and cast his glance first over François, then over me, then towards the windows facing on the Place, from which possibly he was being watched. And there was something about his whole manner that formed a singular contrast with his rather ponderous robustness, something that savoured equally of pretentiousness and perturbation.

"Monsieur Landargues," he said — but before speaking, this man, once so disdainful of me, had recognised my presence by a low bow — "I saw you from my window, and could not resist the pleasure of coming to shake your hand."

"Too amiable of you," returned François.

"You are enjoying good health, I trust?"

"Excellent health. That good old Fardier," François spoke nonchalantly, but it seemed to me that his keen eye lit up with an almost malicious irony, "takes perfect care of me, as you know."

"I know, I know," said Gourdon. A tinge of red had mounted to his swarthy cheeks, but he added at once, almost humbly:

"The skill of my excellent confrère is great, very great."

François' irony did not confine itself to his eyes; for now it lifted the corners of his pale mouth.

After drawing a somewhat deeper breath and glancing once more around him, Gourdon continued, and the tone of his every word was marked with exaggerated politeness:

"I venture to hope that Mme. Landargues, also, is in good health? I made a few new discoveries last Sunday that I think might interest her."

"In that case, Doctor, you must bring them to show to her." And turning towards me, my cousin deigned to explain:

"Dr. Gourdon is a remarkable archæologist. Every Sunday he makes excavations in the woods behind the Quarries; and, on my faith, they yield fine results. He finds potteries and medals. The medals especially interest my grandmother. She is always telling Gourdon that he ought to submit a report to the Academy at Privas."

"She does me that honour," said the Doctor.

"Then it's understood," said François, closing the interview, and stretching out his hand by way of dismissal. "Bring your little playthings to La Cloche one of these days. I will announce your visit, and if by chance I am there myself when you call, I will have you sample my Chateaneuf. Good-day, Gourdon."

But just as the other, after once more respectful bowing to me, turned to go, François detained him, touching those new gaiters with the tip of his walking stick:

"Tell me, if I am not indiscreet, where did you buy them? They are superb."

"From Luscassé, in Avignon," said the Doctor negligently.

"Ah! Of course! That's what I thought. . . . I seemed to recognise the model."

He followed the Doctor a long way with his mocking glance. Having watched him disappear under the dim archway of the Rue des Quatre-Vents, he began to laugh, and his laugh was unkind.

"The silly ass!" he said with a shrug, "decent fellow, to be sure, scrupulously so, but dull, dull to the point of meanness, to the point of stupidity. That's something I cannot stand, any more than I can stand the admiration that he affects to have — and perhaps really does have — for me, for my family, our friends, our fortune. He understands all my tastes, he appreciates them, he shares them. He is not rich and he clings tenaciously to his money. Yet here he is patronising my boot-maker, and he will no doubt soon patronise my tailor, even though it means supping for a month on tomatoes and chick-peas. The lad is no idiot, but the meanness of his spirit, the smallness of his ambitions are insupportable to me. Do you know what is Gourdon's dream? the goal of his whole life? the obsession of all his days? Do you know what stands for him as the personi-

ification of Glory? To become my Doctor, the Doctor of my grandmother and of the few important people of the neighbourhood who are numbered among our friends. That makes you smile . . . That is because you do not yet know the provinces and these old families of small folk in whom the same stubbornness, the same tenacity have persisted throughout centuries. For three hundred years the name of Gourdon appears in the records of Lagarde. I know something of their history, and it amuses me to establish the fact that they are all alike, little notaries, little magistrates, little doctors, mediocre, prudent, servile, humble before the nobility of those days just as this one is humble before me — clinging to them, just as this one would like to cling to us, and accepting kicks, if need were, hat in hand, just as this one accepts irony full in the face. You have seen him. He manages, when I talk with him, to be deaf to the tone and to hear only the words, which are evidently within the dictates of politeness. And he does not wince when I praise Fardier to him, who has attended me since my birth, and whom he detests, counting his years, watching his signs of weariness, awaiting his death."

All the while he was speaking, with an almost nervous volubility, bitter, mordant, malicious, and taking pleasure in being so, François Landargues

continued to laugh and to shrug his shoulders. Brusquely, he interrupted himself.

"Ah!" said he, "let's drop all that, and all these tiresome people of Lagarde! I am so bored, if you only knew! so bored!"

A sudden melancholy, which made him more attractive, softened all his features.

"You will talk to me of Paris, won't you? I dare not return there, because I have an absurd, a shameful fear of dying there all of a sudden, alone, as my father died. But you have just come from there, you are still redolent of Paris."

His pale nostrils widened, and his face, bent towards my shoulder, was very near my own.

"Tell me, do you never go along the Saint-Etienne road? It skirts the bank of the Rhone. No one ever passes that way, and you would think you were back in the early days of the world."

"I tried that road just once."

"You must try it again . . . Thursday, let us say, about five o'clock, when the heat of the day is over."

"Guicharde will be angry."

"Your sister, you mean? I don't like her. I have seen her twice, and I find her manner forbidding. You don't need to tell her anything."

"All the same . . ."

"Ah! What hesitations!" said he impatiently, "how old are you, pray?"

"Twenty-four."

"Then, really, you are rather ridiculous. But you are also altogether charming, and I forgive you. Then it's understood, isn't it? Thursday, on the road to Saint-Etienne? Good-bye, Alvère. . . . Now, don't be scandalised over again. 'Mademoiselle' is too ceremonious between members of the same family who have renounced hostilities, and 'my cousin' sounds much too provincial."

"Good-bye."

"Call me François."

"Good-bye, François."

"And promise you will come Thursday."

"I won't promise."

"All right, but you will come, and that is the essential thing. Good-bye till Thursday, Alvère."

He left me, graceful and weary, supple in his every movement; but in spite of his youth his narrow shoulders stooped too much. For a moment I lingered under the old elm whose curving shadow lay around my feet like the magic circle of enchantment.

And that meeting was followed by all the others.

*

* *

On Thursday I took the Saint-Etienne road, that truly does seem like a road straight out of the

early days of the world, thanks to the wildness and disorder of the tumultuous river and the dense woods; and a few days later I again visited the valley where the deserted Carthusian monastery slumbers. But this time I was not alone, and I paid no heed to the teeming life of its shadows or the bare rocks over which the viper glides. François Landargues held my arm and at times he leaned upon it. He did not speak of love; he never spoke to me of love at any time. But each day we talked more confidentially, or so it seemed to me, a little about myself and a great deal about him.

He believed in nothing, either within himself or outside of him, either on the earth or elsewhere. I believe that he had a naturally fine mind; but I believe, also, that his malady, affecting at once both his heart and nerves, was the cause of his great bitterness, and those accesses of irritability which had destroyed whatever tenderness he may have possessed. And I believe, further, that, in regard to his tastes and desires, the utmost of which he was now capable was a certain sterile and impassioned violence. But how am I to judge him to-day, and what value could attach to my immature judgment at that time? I know only that some of the things he used to say and do so antagonised me that I could not hide the fact, and that there were other things that I treasured

in the depths of my heart, to prolong until our next meeting the turbulent emotion with which he inspired me.

He told me only too often and with too perfect a sincerity;

"It is impossible for me to love any one. My own family even less than others, because I know them better. And I have scant sympathy even for myself."

But he also used to say:

"I am only a poor wretch. I have hours of depression that verge upon despair. But it does me good, Alvère, to take these walks with you, and to see your pretty indignation when I let myself say what I think, and to have you sometimes answer me with your sensible little speeches."

I returned home in a fever of uncertainty. Mamma was seated in her arm-chair. From scraps of many-coloured wool, odd skeins bought from travelling pedlars, she was knitting us strange looking capes for winter wear — capes that we obviously could not wear out of doors, but they would be warm and not easily soiled. She asked me:

"Where have you been, my dear? I don't like to have you roaming the country alone so late in the day; I am always afraid that you will meet with some unpleasant adventure."

"Don't worry!" interposed Guicharde.

"The neighbourhood is safe enough, and Alvère can't get very far on foot; besides, the walking does her good. See how her eyes shine and how animated she is!"

The glance that she rested on me was full of a tenderness almost maternal. Sometimes there was blended with her tenderness a sort of dolorous pity, and I knew then that Guicharde was passing through bad days. Already in her thirties, she suffered from having missed the joys of life, and from having no future prospect of any. Usually she conquered these bitter moods; but sometimes they took full possession and stifled her. With her anguish was mingled a certain indefinable fury at having to suffer so, and the expression of her eyes became almost terrifying. At such times, imagining that my life must be like her own, she choked with sobs whenever she looked at me. I was her other self, only ten years younger, and I really do not know upon which of us two she lavished most pity. At such times she gave way wholly to indulgence and tenderness, and I loved her more dearly for these prodigal moments than for her habitual practicality, to which nevertheless we all owed so much.

"Let her alone, Mamma, it does her good. Where did you go to-day, Alvère?"

I always told her quite frankly, but I did not tell whom I had been with. But later in the even-

ing, after Mamma had retired, I would slip in beside her bed, while Guicharde was still downstairs, satisfying herself that all the doors and shutters were secure, and I would confess to Mamma in a low tone:

"I have seen François Landargues again."

"Again!" poor Mamma would repeat wonderingly. "And was he really nice to you?"

*

* *

A day came, however, when I felt that such confidences were no longer possible; the day when we had gone far out, near the abandoned ruins of the Villa where the handsome Cardinal Julien de La Rovère once held court — the day when for the first time François' lips touched my cheek, and then my own lips. After that day my excursions into the country became more frequent, but I ceased to tell accurately where I went. If I had gone high up among the wooded hill-tops, I sang the praises of the low-lying and moist paths that follow the brooks down to the plain; and if, on the contrary, I had visited the plain, then I talked of the Rocks of Mornas, and their fine colouring of copper-reds and yellows. I lied with no sense of regret, but also with no sense of happiness. A spirit of revolt sustained me, and I focussed it on my mother and Guicharde, for it was from them that I felt the need of protecting myself.

In this way the month of August passed, and then the days of September. François became more and more avid of my company and I of his; and whether we walked side by side along roads parched by the closing days of summer, or went to sit in the woods on the moss-grown and odorous earth, we fell into the habit of indulging in prolonged and dangerous silence. Suddenly this silence would oppress me; I would have a sense of struggling against it, and in my desire to interrupt it, I would utter at random, no matter what brusque and ridiculous little phrase. Then François would look at me with his irritating and doleful smile and take me in his arms.

CHAPTER V.

ONE day he wanted to take me through the woods to a point where there is an especially fine view, extending over and beyond the Quarries.

I met him at the Tourde fountain. He had chosen not to come in his carriage, preferring that none of his servants should know of our meetings, and we gained the summit of the mountain by a steep and stony path, where the swarms of grasshoppers which rose from beneath our feet fell back again with a sound like the patter of hail. There were no trees in this section except small oaks, gnarled and stunted, affording no protecting shadow; and I saw François' shoulders beginning to heave as he panted for breath under the blazing sun.

Finally we came out in full view of the vast Quarries, flaunting their fresh whiteness and their sombre, yawning depths in the riven rocks. But my companion guided me away from that side, and I followed him along a path from which we could look down upon the plain, with its villages shimmering in a blue vapour. Presently we en-

tered the woods. ✓ The ground was already carpeted with fallen leaves. Hot blasts emanated from the heaped-up masses of them; and lying there, crisp and brown, one might fancy that they had been consumed by some perpetual subterranean fire, rather than by the ardour of the sky. François seemed both sad and weary, and I, copying his silence, let him gently caress my bare arm with his hot, feverish fingers.

In the midst of this profound solitude, we presently came upon a sort of clearing, and I was surprised to discover a man rummaging in the ground with a long, iron-pointed stick. He was shabbily dressed in a battered suit, brown and faded like the fallen leaves. Beneath his felt hat, with its drooping brim, and with feet encased in shapeless shoes, grey with age and splitting open, I had at first some difficulty in recognising Dr. Fabien Gourdon. But François had no such uncertainty. A cruel satisfaction suddenly overspread his haggard features. He approached the doctor, and accosted him, thoroughly enjoying the other's confusion at being thus flagrantly caught in the shabby garb of a poacher:

"Well, Doctor," he asked, "are your findings good to-day?"

"I have only just come," said Fabien Gourdon.

He was evidently suffering from hurt vanity, for his face had crimsoned. At the same time his

glance, always deferential when raised toward my companion, now included me in the same deference; and mingled with it was a sincere, almost violent admiration. François pitilessly continued to examine the old felt hat, the old boots, the old garments.

"Good luck," he said at last, without lingering further. "Don't forget, Doctor," and the creases of his ironic mouth deepened, "that the Academy of Privas is awaiting your report. Don't let it languish."

When we had come a little way under the stunted oaks, he began to laugh maliciously, as he once before had laughed in the Place Ronde, where the Canons' residences are.

"Ah . . ." said he, "That Gourdon! What qualities! Economical, just as I told you — pretentious and economical, perhaps even avaricious, the charming fellow! He does not dress well for his own sake, but for the impression he wishes to produce. When he thinks there is no one to impress, he neglects himself shamefully. You just had a chance to admire him. The meanest of my foresters in the Valbonne Woods is better dressed than he. Ah! how annoyed he was, and with good reason, and how opportunely it happened! You noticed his boots, Alvère? . . . Assuredly that pair never came from Luscassé's, for his shop has been open less than ten years."

Walking ahead of me, he struck the brambles aside with his cane, to open a passage for me; and he continued to laugh nervously. Suddenly he stopped laughing, reflected a moment, then turning around:

"Do you know, Alvère," he said, "I believe that Dr. Gourdon is falling in love with you."

"In love with me?" I cried, greatly astonished, "and why should he be in love with me?"

"Simply because I love you," declared François with careless insolence.

We had now reached the foot of some ruins, which in former time must have been a formidable castle commanding this height; and we sat down in their shadow, which already stretched far in front of us. A sort of languor had come over us, due to the lowering weather and our own exertions, and with limbs relaxed we half closed our eyes, in the heavy-laden air where the mingling odours of mint and thyme were cloying as a balm. François' face was pallid in the strong light, and I believe that, at that moment, his malady was causing him intense pain. An occasional quiver passed over his wasted cheek, and his jaws clinched spasmodically.

I either guessed or imagined that his sadness to-day bordered upon anguish, and I said very gently:

"François . . . ?"

He turned, looked at me in silence, then brusquely demanded:

"Alvère, haven't you had about enough of these silly meetings and Sunday-school picnics in the woods?"

"Had enough?" I repeated.

And I failed to understand him, for I saw plainly from the ardour in his eyes that this word "enough" meant something quite different from weariness.

"Yes," he persisted with the peculiar avidity which was apt to follow his moments of indifference, "Would you not be as glad as I if we could meet in greater privacy? Autumn has come and the early nights and heavy rains will soon follow. Listen," and his feverish speech took from me all power to reflect, "you know the old house by the Place Ronde, where the big oak is? My grandmother was not willing that I should have to wait for her death before coming into possession: the house belongs to me."

"I know. . . ."

With the decline of day, the humid odours of autumn had begun to rise from the undergrowth, while in the sky, a clear blue sky verging upon green, long peaceful banks of luminous gold had begun to form, toward which were drifting other clouds, torn and jagged, showing long, crimson gashes in their violet masses.

"The old wreck," continued François, "is quite curious. The windows still have their original thick little panes, through which the whole landscape looks distorted. You will see. . . ."

His phrase, prudently interrupted, hung for a full second in mid-air.

"You will see, on the first floor, in the great drawing-room, a chimney-piece with two fawns, and little salamanders carved upon each stone. I have chosen that room for my library. My bed-chamber opens directly off of it. I am a capricious person. Sometimes I take the notion that I can breathe better in this house than in the other one where we all live. At such times I come and install myself all alone, for a week or more. Everything is kept in readiness for me."

He hesitated again. Then brusquely, with a complete change of manner he continued urgently:

"You will come, won't you? Promise that you will come, Alvère, promise! I am a sick man to-day, Alvère, sick and very sad. For two months our meetings have been my only joy in life, and the bad weather is soon going to put an end to them. You will come? — to keep me from being too utterly wretched! It would be so simple . . . at night . . . yes, at night, because in the daytime you might be seen coming in; but at night the whole town is so dark . . . your people must all retire fairly early, don't they?"

The great clouds above our heads continued to trail along their tattered and ensanguined shapes. I gazed at them for a long time; as I rose to go:

"How could you ever suppose . . . ?"

"Don't look so scandalised! Do the locks of your doors creak so very loudly? What are you afraid of? You could let yourself out, and in again a little later, without anyone being the wiser. If you are afraid I can stop for you and bring you. But you will come? You must take pity on me. I sometimes feel that you are the one person who really understands me, and it is such a comfort to me! You don't know how eagerly I shall wait through the long hours of the day for those short moments of the evening that you are going to give me! You will come . . . you surely will?"

His studied vehemence, perhaps because it was mingled with genuine suffering bewildered me a little as he was quick to perceive.

"What day? Tell me what day?"

"Ah! Don't let us set a day!" I cried.

I was already racing down the path. François followed me at a walk, but leisurely, and without attempting to overtake me. When I reached the woods again I was afraid of losing my way, so I stopped and turned around to wait for him. The look of satisfaction that I saw on his face hurt me in a way that I was destined to recall very often.

CHAPTER VI

I RECALL still another day two weeks later . . . François had said to me, " I shall expect you to-morrow ! " And to-morrow had come. It was raining, one of those furious, torrential autumn rains that plough up the roads and strew the countryside with the wreckage of frail huts of earth and stone. I kept thinking:

" If this continues I shall not go. I shall not be able to go, and he will understand. To-morrow morning they would recognise the tracks left by my muddy shoes in the hallway. They would marvel at my rain-soaked clothing."

And I drew a sort of comfort from every blast, every downpour that beat harder upon the roof, lashing the walls and threatening to dash in the windows. But towards the middle of the day, the great clouds driving headlong towards the north ceased to be followed by other clouds. A tone of soft grey spread evenly over the sky, changing rapidly to white. The wind died down. As anxiously as though my very life were in the balance, I watched those last mists melt away; soon the pure blue of the sky shone here and there through the gaps. Little by little these patches

of sky widened and multiplied until that terrible azure triumphantly filled my whole horizon, from the nearest roofs, still wet and glistening, to the distant hill tops, on which the roads, the trees, the very stones seemed to stand out, clear-cut and distinct.

Adélaïde opened the windows. A delicious odour arose from the plain. One recognised in it the blended aromas of the water-drenched earth and of all sorts of herbs, but dominating the more delicate savours was the heavy pungency of wet mint, so perceptible to the lips that they involuntarily parted to taste it.

I went out upon the terrace, and Guicharde came with me. The sun, already low, now burst forth, flooding us with an unbearable effulgence, seemingly determined to dispense in these few last moments all the ardour that it had kept close hid throughout the whole sad day. Unseen birds called and answered, back and forth, between our three fig trees and the plane trees bordering the highway. Before long came the distant hooting of little owls through the twilight. And presently the pale crescent of the moon became brighter than the sky.

Guicharde sighed:

"It is going to be a fine night."

She had the haggard features, the hard eyes of her worst days. I felt resentful; for all this suf-

fering that she made only too apparent, served only to convince me that any other form of suffering, no matter what, would be preferable to hers. Far down below us, old Mélie was walking in her narrow garden; she stopped and shook her head before the little winter cabbages, transplanted the night before, and all beaten flat by the rain. Further down still, upon the high-road, a little girl was leading a grey goat at the end of a rope. The hungry beast kept rearing up against the hedges, still dripping with the rain, and shook the branches with furious avidity.

"That child is too silly," remarked Guicharde. "She should wait until the leaves and the grass are drier before taking her goat out to browse. She will kill the poor thing. If I was down there on the road I would tell her so."

I marvelled that such trivial matters could so easily rouse her from her moodiness. Even when carried away by unruly dreams, her sound common sense was always close at hand and brought her prompt succour.

Following her example, I also tried to find something in our surroundings that would hold my attention. But I saw only, behind the little guardian of the goat, three men walking along the road. They were workmen from the Quarries; I knew that from their shoes and their clothing,

powdered over with white stone-dust, and I could not help thinking:

"Of course he has not been to the Quarries to-day in all this heavy rain! He has had to stay at home . . . in his own house. He has been waiting for me . . . he is still waiting."

Alas! Everything was urging me towards him, and there were no defences left me. In the dining-room, Mamma, who was helping Adélaïde set the table, called out to us:

"Look out for the mosquitoes!"

And although I had not felt a single one, I replied:

"You are right. I am coming in. It is unbearable out here."

I went up to my bedroom; I put on a fresh shirt-waist, and did my hair over with care. Poor naïve toilet, in course of which my heart beat so violently that I fancied I could hear it! When I was seated at the table, Mamma remarked upon my being so dressed-up, and Guicharde said with a laugh:

"Do you mean to adopt the English fashion, Alvère, and dress every evening with all this care?"

Then she added practically:

"That blouse is charming, but it will muss easily. You had better keep it fresh for Sunday."

"It is easy to iron it again."

"Yes," said Mamma, "but that ends by burning the threads."

Apropos of this they discussed the advantages of boiled starch over raw, and compared the durability of linen and cotton fabrics. During the whole meal we concerned ourselves with trivial matters, and it did me good. But how soon supper was over! Never before had it seemed to me so niggardly for the soup to be followed only by a vegetable and a little fruit. Twenty minutes! Our supper had not lasted more than twenty minutes! Afterwards, when the table had been cleared, Guicharde brought out her account book and Mamma her knitting. Neither of them spoke. And I dreaded the silence which was settling down on us; I felt it forming around me, full of redoubtable thoughts, of too violent emotions, of hasty resolutions, the precise nature of which I did not yet quite know.

"Guicharde," I begged, "let's play a game of lotto?"

"To-morrow, dear, I can't to-night, for I must cast up my fortnightly balance, and I want to get to bed early."

"I am sleepy already," said Mamma, "One sleeps well during these first cold nights."

There was nothing left for me but to take a book and sit down beside them. An hour passed.

Mamma's long needles moved slower and slower in her somnolent hands. Finally, Guicharde thrust her account-book into the deep pocket of her black apron; she rose to put the pen and ink-stand in their place at the corner of the mantel-piece; then left the room to close the big front door and the little door opening out from the kitchen. I listened fearfully, straining my ears. But the locks in our house were always carefully oiled, and made not the least sound. This complicity of the locks, though not unforeseen, struck me as quite amazing; it aided and abetted and decided everything.

"How easy it will be to go out!" I thought, "and how simple it will be to come in again!"

And it seemed to me that from now on I had done with all hesitation. "Come," thought I, "as soon as they are both in bed. . . ." I waited feverishly for Guicharde to return. She appeared at last, crossed over to the window, assured herself that the shutters were secure and that if the wind should rise during the night it could not set them slamming.

"Well," she said, having completed all her little tasks, "shall we go up?"

By this time I had convinced myself that I was tingling with impatience, that never before had I been in such a hurry to get away from them. Yet, all at once, I found myself begging:

"Oh, no, not quite yet!"

"Oh! yes, indeed!" declared Mamma. "I can't sit up a moment longer, my dears. My eyes are closing of themselves."

She was already starting to rise from her arm-chair, and Guicharde, standing up, was preparing our candles on the corner of the table. I looked from one to the other and murmured desperately:

"Don't let me go out to-night . . . don't let me go out. . . ."

Mamma leaned across the old velour covering of the acacia chair-arm, which alone separated us.

"Go out! You had meant to go out? . . . at this time of night!"

But Guicharde's haunting dreams of cheated love had given her subtle insight. Gasping with alarm and indignation, she demanded sharply:

"Whom were you going to meet?"

"Alvère!" cried Mamma.

And notwithstanding that I tightly closed my eyes, I could still see all the horror that flooded over her face. With head held high, and without trying to hide behind my two hands, which remained clasped on the edge of the table, I wept silently, while the incessant trembling of my shoulders shook my entire body, and sent waves of intolerable pain across my features. I do not know how many minutes this continued, nor do I know how much they were able at the moment to under-

stand, those two silent women whose hearts were aching for me . . . No, I do not know how much they understood, the one through her memories, the other through her regrets, both of them through, pain born of frustrated love. Then Mamma said, very low:

“ My poor little girl! ”

“ Little Sister,” said Guicharde.

They each touched me on the arm, and I had to unclasp my two hands and give them each one to hold. I still kept my eyes tight shut, and I still wept. None the less I was gradually becoming calmer, and it was their turn now to lose control, and I could feel their poor fingers trembling passionately within my own.

CHAPTER VII

I*T has been raining steadily for a week. December will soon be upon us. A damp, chill odour that seems to come from water-soaked stones, ready to drop apart — stones of old and dripping walls, stones of street pavements, between which uninterrupted little floods go leaping — rises from the whole town. A fierce, wild dance is raging over our house, a ceaseless capering and stamping, that threatens to cave in the old tiled roof. There is a maddening monotony in this endless, insistent noise, that bewilders and dazes and induces a sort of lethargy blended with an intolerable foreboding.— Oh! Autumn — so like that other autumn which followed the night that I didn't go to François Landargues'— in order to bear the pain that you recall, one must be either very rich in inward resources, or else utterly poor. But I am equally removed from great genius and sheer stupidity. Mediocrities like myself can only feel and suffer.*

No single day stands out from a mournful sequence of days that followed. I do not see this period of my past life as a series of hours rolling up into weeks marked off by Sundays. I see it,

rather, as a heavy grey mass, like the November fogs that spread over the meadows at twilight. The weather was bad; night shut down early. Mammā, still perturbed by the confidences I had *been forced to make, sat watching me only too often with helpless anxiety. Then she would close her eyes, and the thoughts that forced themselves upon her in those few minutes deepened the lines in her pale and fine-cut features.* It was she at such moments, who bore the weight of my remorse, for she could not console herself that it was from her soul and body that I derived my share of passion and of weakness. But the subject was never mentioned by her. This was the one favour I had begged, and she had agreed to it; and the name of Landargues which, in the daily routine of our provincial life, had hitherto occurred quite often, was no longer even mentioned.

I would not admit that I was unhappy, even to myself. I often forced myself to laugh and devoted all my will power to keeping constantly and usefully busy, helping with the housekeeping and dressmaking, folding the linen and preparing the apples and figs for our winter stock of preserves. All these small tasks helped to keep memory at bay, but the moment they were interrupted the whole weight of my wretchedness swooped down upon me again and drove its talons deeper and deeper into my heart. I sought, in imagination

or in memory, at once tireless and elusive, to conjure up the François of our meetings, his phrases, his looks, his very gestures. And often I found myself loving him all in all, even to his chronic gloom and twisted smile, even to his sterile heart and pain-begotten irony. But often, also, reading him more clearly, I had no feeling left but repulsion.

Twice already I had seen him again, once in the Rue Puits-aux-Boeufs, and once on the quay beside the Rhone. I was no longer permitted to go out alone, and I did not ask to. On both occasions Guicharde was walking with me. And, without either quickening or slackening his pace, he had bowed with an air of indifference, at the same time bending upon me a glance containing neither regret nor entreaty, but only the most ironic contempt — which hurt with a deep and lasting sting that he knew only too well how to cause. Did he love me, had he ever loved me? And was there any love in what I myself felt for him? As the days passed I began to be less certain of the causes of the wretchedness which still possessed me. The man himself was slowly fading out of my thoughts. And I remember, as spring was approaching, the happy hours that I spent sitting at the window in my bedroom, which was the smallest room at the end of the white-washed hallway. What a relief it was to find my-

self free-hearted and at peace. The sun disappeared behind the hills of the Ardèche, and before me from the sky in which the last rays were dissolved, to the river which mirrored back both, the whole space was occupied by one glow of honey-gold.

Poor little ignorant souls like mine, alternately at peace and aflame, revelling in your folly, yet grateful for the respite of sober hours! Do you ever learn when and where you are well off?

*

* *

The spring was black and changeable, as it often is in our section, with blasts of icy wind that shook the opening blossoms on their stems and knocked them off, and with so hot a sun that the wheat in the blade seemed to shoot upward from minute to minute under one's very eye. I had begun to go out alone again, in the little streets in the vicinity of our house, and sometimes I caught a glimpse of Dr. Gourdon. He passed our way on his visits to the child of a carpenter that had tuberculosis of the bones — a child in whom a certain Mme. Livron had interested herself, a very rich woman and a great friend of old Mme. Landargues. The Doctor always bowed with great respect and gave me a long lingering glance.

One day he spoke to me. It was in front of the "House with the Heads," on which three

lords and four ladies of the time of King Francis I, marvellously sculptured in stone, bend down from cross-barred windows their befeathered and pearl-bedecked heads. The street is unclean and very narrow. Just as I was passing the Doctor, I slipped on a potato paring and narrowly missed a fall. He extended his arm to save me, and when I thanked him, laughing at my awkwardness, he laughed with me. Next, he inquired as to my health, and inquired with much interest about my mother, whom he sometimes saw on Sunday, and whom he found, so he told me, a little pale and tired-looking. I answered that she was, as a matter of fact, in fragile health, and then we stood facing each other, not knowing what to say next.

Then, after hesitating slightly, or so it seemed to me, he asked:

"Is it very long, Mademoiselle, since you have seen M. François Landargues?"

It was a commonplace question. Yet it disconcerted me, for I was not expecting it, and I answered, with exaggerated and awkward indifference, "Yes, very long." Fabien Gourdon was not tactful enough to ignore my obvious discomposure.

"Oh," he said, slightly lowering his voice, "I beg your pardon for having awakened memories. . . ."

"There are no memories!" I retorted.

"So much the better!" approved Gourdon.

Yet he sighed, because he took it for granted that I had an aching heart, and he wanted to convey his whole sympathy.

“What else was to be expected? Any one must have foreseen that such an uncompromising person as Mme. Landargues would never permit her grandson to marry according to the dictates of his heart!”

Was it possible that the Doctor believed that François had actually wanted to marry me? I was quite touched, and not a little flattered to discover that there was some one who had entertained this thought, which had never even occurred to me. I regarded Gourdon more attentively. His eyes expressed admiration, pity and sincerity. Then I realised that he was honest, both in heart and in mind, doubtless more so than I was, for after giving a vague gesture that might be taken to mean complete detachment from things already so remote, I made no attempt to undeceive him.

*

* *

A few days later, Mamma went to return the call of Mme. Perisse, the widow of a notary from Vaison, who had shown himself friendly, and came home again quite excited. At Mme. Perisse's she had met Dr. Gourdon, who had courteously asked permission to call. She was at a loss to understand this incident, which she did not cease to dis-

cuss with Guicharde; and the two, aided by Adélaïde, undertook a thorough cleaning of the parlour, a damp and gloomy room which we never used, and which was furnished only with an acacia-wood sofa, four arm-chairs and a small, round centre-table.

But Fabien Gourdon gave them no time to put the parlour in order; he presented himself the next day but one, and we had to receive him on the terrace and simply offer him one of our wicker chairs, which, however, he declared very comfortable. He said, also, that our view was the best in the vicinity, and our garden the best kept, and he continually called Mamma, "Madame Landargues," pronouncing the name with a deference that flattered her immensely. I saw at once that she liked him very much, and that Guicharde liked him too. He, for his part, quickly perceived this too, and prolonged his visit more than two hours, in the course of which he obligingly told us every detail about himself that there was to tell.

He told us of his hard work, of his patients, of his professional devotion. He told us of his family, of his childhood and of his mother who had brought him up, having been left a widow very young. He assured us that her virtues and her sound judgment in all matters were remarkable. "She was a methodical woman; in our house not a servant could have eaten a crust of

bread above her allotted ration without my mother discovering it." He declared further: "She was a practical woman." And he told us how, when he was eighteen, she had discussed with him the choice of a career, and how they had weighed every detail of the cost, reckoning on profit side the fact that, all things considered, the neighbourhood is quite unhealthy, with its fierce heat and high winds, and that between the heat and the cold which keep the patients coughing a long time, a Doctor is justified in paying frequent visits. These calculations inspired him with great admiration, and he held them up for ours. It was plain to be seen that he continued to follow these precepts, and regulated all his acts with a narrow and studied prudence. I envied my mother and sister their ability to listen so attentively, with every sign of sincere appreciation. They were leaning attentively forward with heads slightly bowed, and hands clasped upon their knees. For my part, meanwhile, I was wholly engrossed in fighting down a memory, the memory of the day when Fabien Gourdon bowed to me for the first time within the round shadow of the big elm, with François Landargues at my side.

↳ François' words of that moment, and François' laugh obsessed me to such a degree that I had a wild desire to shut my two hands over my ears to stop my hearing them. Some presentiment, per-

haps, of what lay in store for me down the vista of future days, almost goaded me into interrupting Fabien Gourdon, and begging him not to talk like that, when certain phrases more displeasing than the rest struck me as justifying only too well François' ironical and disdainful comments. This was especially true when, reverting to his family, he began to talk of all those Gourdons, established at Lagarde for upward of three hundred years.

"A bourgeois nobility," he asserted, "but older than many families of the other kind, and of very high merit."

And not without pride he proceeded to relate the history of the more important of these ancestors. One of them, a Doctor, was attached for six months to the person of one of the Marquises of Saint-Restitut, the one who was ambassador to the King of Italy, and accompanied him on his travels — and Fabien obviously still felt the reflected glory. Another, a notary, enjoyed throughout twenty years the confidence of a powerful descendant of the Lords of Mornas. And this seemed to the Doctor as beautiful as a fairy tale. "Little minds," François had said, "little vanities, big platitudes." And after picturing them with his derisive laugh, such as I must needs recognise them to be to-day, servile and mediocre, and in their insatiable vanity ceaselessly dancing attendance upon the rich and powerful, had he not

said in conclusion: "The race is incapable of change, and this fellow is like all the others" . . . ?

Detestable memories! Sitting on that peaceful terrace, bathed in April sunshine, side by side with Mamma and Guicharde in their happy contentment, I continued to fight these memories off. And imitating the wisdom of these two dear women, I tried with all my strength to see all that this man was telling us of his family and of himself, in the aspect which he wished to give it and which was admirable.

*

* *

Mamma had found so much pleasure in the Doctor's visit that she asked him to call again. He did so the following week, and after that he dropped in upon us quite regularly. According as his other engagements permitted, he would sometimes arrive at the mid-day hour when, in those fine days of springtime, even the most humble household is redolent of strawberries and newly baked bread. But he came more often towards evening, when the circling bats had begun to whirl and flutter around the fir tree, like so many mysterious and palpitating little hearts. One day when Orpise had offered us a chicken still young and tempting, Mamma begged the Doctor to share our repast. One evening he

stayed so late that when he left we could no longer see the houses down on the plain; there was nothing before us still awake except the great Rhone, with its rushing tide, that would have swept along in its course the very stars, but was impotent to do more than scatter their soft light into countless flashes.

After he had gone Guicharde and Mamma usually lapsed into silence. They had begun to avoid talking of him to me, and I saw clearly that they were both possessed by hopes that soared too high. But if I happened to show any signs of brooding, they became anxious and Guicharde would say:

“Come, let's go for the leaves.”

For in order to supplement our little income by a few dozen francs she had decided to “make silkworms,” as they say at Lagarde. She had bought three ounces of the eggs, and the larvæ had just hatched. We had installed the trays which held them in a little building on the terrace, which my grandfather had formerly used for his carpenter-shop; we built big fires of underbrush and branches, and three times a day we went out to the sloping fields that stretch up on the hill-sides and picked from the round mulberry trees the thick tender leaves that left a moisture on our fingers.

The earth was all a-quiver with its new life; as we went from tree to tree, we had to be care-

ful not to trample on the young wheat and barley just bursting from the ground. The acacia with its fragile flowers, the nettle-tree which, for a few days seems to have no leaves at all, thanks to its immense and snowy canopy of bloom; the pink briarwood and the rarer blossoms of the pomegranate blooming here and there in our southern gardens, were all resplendent with their gay colours, and the noisy welcome of the bees.

"Just hear them," I said to Guicharde," just hear those bees! "

And we could also hear from along the highway on the other side of the river, the homesick tinkle of the bells from the great droves of cattle from the Camargue district, on their way up toward the Alps, to spend the hot season. These bells are heard from dawn until evening, all through the days of spring. And the dust raised by so many beasts on the march hangs above the even rows of plane trees, and seems in full sunlight like another cloud hanging lower than the rest, as though dragged down by a greater weight of gold.

One Thursday, when there was an extra large wash, and Guicharde was obliged to stay at home, I had to go alone for the leaves, and was returning slowly up the steep path which ascends to the town, with the big basket on my arm piled high with my pickings. I was surprised to see my sister coming down the path almost at a run.

Evidently she had come to meet me, for she stopped and waited when she saw me. She had on her linen blouse which she never wore excepting in the house, and she had no hat on her head. She called out to me:

"Hurry up!"

"What is the matter?"

Her coming for me, coupled with her agitation, frightened me. When I reached her, she seized me by the arm; and she laughed, looking at me with eyes full of tears.

"No, there is nothing to be frightened at. Hurry up, Mamma is waiting!"

"But what is it?"

"Mamma will tell you."

As we hurried on I could fairly feel the sweet odours of spring brushing against my face, like two hands seeking to clasp it. By this time we were back in the town. The glad light of the clear blue sky entered the open windows, penetrating to the inmost corners. The mirrors, hanging on the walls, received and passed on its health-giving virtues to the farthest depths of those sombre chambers; the shining copper and polished furniture gave back gleam for gleam.

"Guicharde, is it good news?"

"You will soon know."

When we reached our door she called out:

"Here she is!"

And I heard Mamma fairly running across the hall. She threw herself into my arms and dragged me in; and the moment Guicharde had closed the door behind us:

"Alvère! . . . Doctor Gourdon had been here to ask you to marry him!"

They both began to cry, while I, leaning on the margin of the table, turned my eyes up to that beautiful clear sky whose gladness had found its way even into our house.

"A husband for you, a husband!" said Mamma, so solemn that she was almost fervent, and clasping her hands.

"A husband!" repeated Guicharde.

They held me close to them, then drawing back a little, stared at me in a sort of dazed wonder. One would have thought that something like a miracle had been wrought upon me.

"You do love him, don't you? You do love him?" questioned Guicharde.

And Mamma said gravely:

"Ah! How dearly you ought to love him!"

They told me it was agreed that he should come back that same evening to receive my answer, of the nature of which he had no doubt. Before he came, but after night had already begun to shut down, I went out into our garden and seated myself on the brick margin that forms the basin of our fountain. My whole heart was craving to

be filled with hope; nevertheless, my lids were heavy and my eyes were cast down. In the depths of the dark water the image of the moon rested like a great pearl, and when a breath of wind passed it quivered and seemed to dissolve into little waves of fugitive splendour.

CHAPTER VIII

AT the point I have reached in my humble story I realise that I ought to tell what happened during the first weeks and months of our married life, and how at first, in spite of all the reasons I had for misgiving, I really believed that I was happy. Fabien, perhaps, repeated a little too often, "François Landargues was in love with you, wasn't he? . . . he really was in love with you?" And perhaps at such moments the passionate admiration that I inspired in him, his violent tenderness, his impetuous love, took on an even greater passion and violence and impetuosity. Neglecting everything, forgetting everything, he seemed throughout the duration of long days unable to tear himself away from me; while the pleasant novelty of knowing that I was loved prevented me from giving serious thought to anything else. And when Fabien began to resume his professional calls, and to be absent from morning onward, driving about the country, I must confess that I spent my days in waiting for his return, and that among all the sounds of evening none was so welcome as the breathless panting of the little motor that brought him back to me in

his rather low-hung, heavily-built grey car that looked like some sort of gigantic beetle which had been rolling in the dust.

Yes, here is the place, no doubt, to tell all this. Only it lasted so short a time. What Fabien called his common-sense came back to him as quickly as the incoming tides recover the sands that for a moment have been warmed and set free by the sun and the strong wind;— and immediately he began again to extol his mother's rigid virtues; and ceaselessly holding them up to me as an example, he organised our life on a basis of narrow prudence and close calculations that controlled not only his least acts, but every thought and feeling he allowed himself to have.

Yet, whatever he might demand, and whatever the worth of his advice, I was still glad to question nothing and to yield him obedience, and I tried hard to believe that he was always right. But little by little these good intentions which had filled my heart, this fond blindness to which I obstinately clung, gradually ebbed away in spite of all my efforts. Little by little . . . little by little . . . Oh! to explain this clearly one would need, no doubt, to have done far more reading, to know more words and, in that dark and delicate domain of secret longings and unspoken grievances, know how to conduct oneself with more serenity and tactfulness. It was a mat-

ter, sometimes, of one word that it were better not to have heard; or another time the imprudence of asking "What are you thinking of?" and then discovering when the thought has been told in all sincerity, the full extent of its vulgarity and distastefulness. And finally these repeated disillusion end in a more exact revelation of a poverty of soul which one has all this time been so sadly struggling not to know or even to suspect!

Autumn was half over; already rainy days had begun to mingle with the fine weather and in spite of the full warmth of the season's last lingering rays, at any minute a passing breath of wind gave a biting foretaste of the coming cold. As evening shut down, the north wind began to toss and twist the little dry leaves on the top of our acacia; it shook the doors roughly and made its way through the crevices of the shutters until, finding myself shivering, I lighted a big wood fire in my bedroom, the first fire of the season. The gloomy room at once took on a cheerful look; even the heavy old furniture took on a blyther aspect; the foreboding sense of melancholy which had lately grown upon me, and which had held me in its grip all day, suddenly left me; and I sat beside my fire and waited for Fabien as eagerly, I think, as I used to wait for him beside my open window in early summer, during the first weeks of our married life.

When he arrived he was in great excitement and, beginning an account of his day, he informed me first of all that, when passing the entrance to La Cloche he had stopped and gone in to pay a visit to old Mme. Landargues, and that she had received him very cordially.

Now, this implacable woman, so proud of heart and tenacious in her rancour, had ignored my marriage as utterly as she did every other detail of our humble lives. When Fabien announced it to her, she had had the insolence to reply, "Do not mention those people to me, I beg of you, if you care to remain one of my friends." Since this speech he had not seen her again; nor had he seen François who was travelling in Spain — with Julie Béraud, so gossip said — and who had sent him on a visiting card precisely four words of congratulation. To be sure he did sometimes boast of meeting at the Café a certain Romain de Buire, François' nephew on his mother's side, who, during his uncle's absence, took his place as manager at the Quarries. Fabien in speaking of the young man, called him "My friend de Buire." But that was merely rather silly. And I ventured to hope that we should henceforth ignore the Landargues as completely as they, with insolent disdain, had hitherto ignored us.

Consequently, on hearing Fabien's announce-

ment, I could not refrain from exclaiming. He regarded me with extreme surprise.

"But," he said, "she has always treated me most amiably. I shall not be so stupid as to risk losing such a valuable connection."

And it was, I really believe, the simplicity, the sincerity with which he pronounced that little phrase, that hurt me most of all.

"And . . . did she inquire after me?"

Tears were already rising to my eyes. My voice trembled.

"Why, no," he answered still quite simply and without resenting the insult to him any more than the insult to me. "Why should she? She is made like that. We talked together, absolutely as in the old days, of history and medals. In this connection, she advised me —"

"Oh!" I cried, "then you don't understand?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and declared:

✓ "I understand that you are thinking only of your susceptibilities. Life requires more adaptability."

And without giving me a chance to add another word, he went on to tell me that François had returned from Spain, but was very ill, and that Fardier had ordered him to the mountains for what might be a lengthy stay. Hereupon, shrugging his shoulders, he burst into a violent tirade against

this old man, whom the Landargues valued so highly, declaring that his prescriptions were stupid and he himself an ass; the worst sort of calamities might befall idiots capable of trusting themselves to his hands. Of course, I knew that he had no love for Fardier, nor for Mandel either, his other colleague in Lagarde; but never before, it seemed to me, had he expressed his opinion with such savage bitterness and visible envy. At last he left me, to go to his study for his mail, and his departure was a relief. But the cheerful flames of a few minutes ago had burned themselves out behind the tall, rusty andirons. An acrid smoke rose in whistling jets from the blackened logs, and, clasping my crossed arms tight against my heart, I fell to trembling in that gloomy room, surrounded by that heavy furniture, shaken with interminable and painful little shivers.

That was the day, yes, it must have been, when for the first time I recognised my husband for what he had never ceased to be, with his sycophant's heart, his small and sluggish imagination, his lack of any finer thoughts or feelings. But how many more days it was still to take before I should reach the desolate conviction that really and truly this was what he was! How many struggles, how many struggles, how many bitter disillusionments I still had before me, steadily growing in number and cumulative force, carrying convic-

tion in face of all resistance, and each and every one leaving its separate suffering and scar! Alas! I had to recognise now that what he was trying to teach me with all his advice about the proper management of the house, was really that mistrust of servants, that grasping extortion, that special type of avarice taught by his mother, and which he was determined to make me practice. His advice, at the moment which I was about to make or receive calls, was dictated by the meanest and most undiluted vanity. And I know of nothing more undignified than his distress when he talked to me of himself, and of his ample talents, and flew into a rage because he did not yet hold the position in Lagarde that he deserved, and was sure that he would yet find a way to secure it. He had among his clients a few wealthy tradesmen, and two important landowners who lived on the plain, and he was constantly repeating their names, anxious over their most trifling indispositions, and so pleased at a chance to visit them that I believe he would willingly have consented to treat them free of charge. But it made him furious that his chief practice had to be among the poorer classes, and he treated them with merciless arrogance.

Twice a week he had his consultation days. On those days he required that a religious silence should pervade the house. The servant had to wear an apron with lace flaps, such as are worn in

the big cities; and in the dining-room, where his humble patients, with sunburnt faces and horny hands, waited, anxious and respectful, in their Sunday best, our four pieces of silverware — all that we possessed — had to be conspicuously displayed in the centre of the table. I myself, if I had occasion to pass through the dining-room, had to take off the little grey apron that he insisted I should wear over my old dresses — the only kind of negligée that he would tolerate even in our home.

“ But,” I said to him, “ what difference do you suppose all this makes to those poor people? ”

“ It makes this difference,” he retorted, “ that they will think me rich and let me charge them higher rates.”

I tried in vain to discover in him any noble purpose, any enthusiastic or generous impulse. All his motives were mediocre and the result of narrow calculation. Even his honesty was so mixed with apprehension and self-interest as to render it insufferable. So it was in vain that I tried to force my love to cling to him; for there was nothing about him to which it could cling. So the hours began to seem to me sometimes too long drawn out, and still more often, as I watched them regularly succeed one another and pass away, I felt suffocated by their passing as one feels suffocated by a high wind.

Fabien had introduced me into a society somewhat better than that which I had been able to know through Mamma. But there is little visiting done in Lagarde, and the people are not interesting. So I spent my days at home, and busied myself with dressmaking and putting the closets in order. But a vague, persistent melancholy, a bitter discouragement, mingled with all I did, and spoiled any sense of satisfaction that I might have had. Now, I had known from childhood that my life was destined to be humble and occupied by simple tasks; the position that I had attained was, in kind, far superior to the highest ambition that I had ever been allowed to indulge in; and my trouble now did not come from boredom or from a craving for pleasures.

The winter days were devoid of gaieties, but even more melancholy were the long days of spring. It was then that I opened my window, and the odours of the fields and the noises of the street mingled around me and brought me comfort. A small child laughed; a carriage rumbled over the noisy paving. Towards evening, women came down to the fountain for water; I could hear the creaking of the pump, and the splash of the water flowing into the earthen jars . . . But I felt all my apprehension return when I saw the shadow mounting little by little on the wall opposite me, creeping and crawling like a sly cat, for

now I dreaded the hour of Fabien's return, and the stories he would tell me of the day's doings, and of all the little projects, little grudges, little ideas that he would retail to me throughout the interminable evening.

*

* *

Meanwhile, Mamma, as much obsessed with the marvel of my marriage as she was that first day when she told me of the offer, never failed to repeat each morning when I went to see her:

"You are a happy woman."

And her conviction was so profound that I was forced to repeat after her:

"Yes, I am happy."

But her frail health continued to fail. And she caught cold on the terrace one day when it was windy. In a few hours she had a high fever, and I realised that she was going to die. In vain I begged Fabien in my alarm to call some other doctor in consultation, some one from Valence or Lyons, if not one of his brother practitioners in Lagarde. He told me that the patient's condition was no doubt grave, but quite simple, and that there was no need of undergoing such a humiliation; and Mamma herself disapproved of my idea, repeating in feeble tones that her son-in-law's care was the best in the world, and that she wanted

no other. So I was forced to watch this precious life slip away . . . It was in the early dawn after a more peaceful night, Guicharde and I were alone with her. She turned suddenly in bed and looked at us. My sister was kneeling by the fire and stirring some medicine which had to be taken as a warm draught; but I sprang forward at the call of those eyes into which her spirit had arisen for the last time.

"Mamma!"

She tried to smile.

"Hold fast," she said very low, "hold fast to your happiness."

And it was over before Guicharde had time for the ten steps she must take to reach my side and fall sobbing upon the bed.

Ah! Dear dead mother, how near to us you have always seemed to be! † From that moment, down to the present hour, we have always felt your presence in our hearts, as real and vital as though still in the flesh. In our loneliness, Guicharde and I constantly talked of her. Each of us strove to draw forth whatever memories and mental pictures the other had preserved. We shared them together, with our sobs; sometimes, also, with tender and desolate smiles. And we could no longer bear to be apart. So Fabien proposed that Guicharde should come and live with us. I was deeply touched at his having divined

our secret desire. But after he had accepted my thanks, he proceeded to explain his reasons.

"It will enable me," he said, "to rent your mother's house. The rental from it will be small, but nothing is to be despised. Besides, it will make a good impression not to desert your sister in her loneliness. Only yesterday Mme. Perisse asked a number of questions regarding her which showed me the drift of public opinion, and clearly indicated what is the proper thing to do. Furthermore, Adélaïde would doubtless come with her. She is an honest girl, satisfied with small wages, and will enable us to effect a helpful economy in the matter of service."

Guicharde's presence did more than console me in my bereavement. She helped me also to fight down another trouble that was beginning to haunt me steadily. A little older and thinner, with eyes more beautiful than ever, yet still the same authoritative, exalted, sorrow-haunted Guicharde, she helped me by the passionate admiration, the generous and delighted envy with which my supposed happiness never ceased to inspire her.

She rejoiced at the bigness of my house, the beauty of my furniture, the abundance of my resources. But more especially — and here is where she was chiefly helpful — she regarded Fabien as an oracle of wisdom, as devoted as any woman could wish, and remarkable down to his

most trifling utterance. For, satisfied by surface appearance, she never took the trouble to look behind them and probe down to those depths of the inner-consciousness which are the sole and supreme reality. So she pictured my husband as she saw him through the pangs of her own loneliness and the simplicity of her own spirit; I listened docilely and, by persistently telling myself that she was right, I ended by convincing myself too. Then for a time I enjoyed a deep contentment, through recognising that the whole cause of my pain was due solely to my own foolishness and ignorance, and the clumsiness of my own poor judgment. And thus by reviving such poor remnants of my love as were essential to me, I sometimes succeeded in extracting some joy from it.

CHAPTER IX

IT was two years after Mamma's death that old Mme. Landargues died in her turn. Fabien had been to see her quite often, but had not again ventured to speak of her to me. He learned the news on the way home one day when coming back from his round of visits; and he came at once to tell me, but with the cautious indirect manner that one affects to soften a blow. When at last he had reached the end of his prudent and consoling phrases I stared at him in utter amazement.

"Then the long and the short of it is," said I, "that she is dead. Other and better women have died younger. Did you expect me to burst into tears?"

He retorted:

"A few tears would be no more than decent; she was your own father's mother."

After pacing up and down the room thoughtfully and with bowed head, he questioned gravely:

"I wonder whether you ought not to go to the funeral? It is going to be a very fine one."

"What, I? At that woman's funeral?"

"Good Lord!" said Fabien, "How ridiculous

you are, with your surprise and your exclamations! You are of her blood, aren't you, and now that she is dead she can no longer object if you proclaim it a little louder than you have done in the past. It wouldn't hurt you any, nor me either."

He realised, however, that I would not yield, and he was far from pleased; but her death had roused in him too many important and perturbing thoughts to permit him to dwell especially upon any one of them.

"Very well," said he, "I will attend the ceremony by myself; but you must recognise that this death necessarily alters many things. I am not referring to money matters. Your father made such a foolish bargain that there is nothing to be expected in that regard. I knew about it before I married you and am not reproaching you now. But we must take advantage of the present circumstance to show the world clearly that the Landargues family is our family, and you will oblige me by getting your mourning ready."

"My mourning!"

This time I was indignant to the point of revolt.

"I won't do it! I won't do it! She hated us, and I hated her."

"Oh! as for that," said Fabien, crossing over and looking down at me sternly, "This is a point on which I shall insist, and all the more because

it will not cost a sou, for you still have the black dresses that you wore for your mother."

The fire that was now burning on the hearth was not the first fire of the year, although very likely the last, for the weather was mild. That very morning I had leaned from the barn window and picked some fragrant blossoms from our acacia tree. And now, watching those superfluous flames, I said despairingly to Fabien, just as I had said to him on a certain other evening:

"Then you don't understand?"

"How exasperating it is," he cried, "this forever being told that I ought to understand, by a woman who never understands anything!"

He was so insistent and ended by ordering me with such violence to get one of my black dresses out of the closet, and decide at once what repairs would have to be made, that I found myself obliged to yield. I learned later that, in the days which followed, he told every one, in speaking of me:

"She was very deeply affected by the death of her grandmother, Mme. Landargues."

The material of my black dress was already old, and was beginning to look rusty in the sunlight. This was humiliating to Fabien when he had occasion to go out with me; so, as he wished to avoid

the expense of another dress for such short service, he permitted me at the end of three months to lay aside my mourning.

I obeyed once again, simply and without uttering a single comment. But Guicharde's indulgent approval of Fabien was henceforth no longer any help to me; and as I sat beside her, through the long hours of that oppressive summer, I only too often let my needle lie idle in my passive hands. The house, groaning and crackling in every joint with the sun's heat, had every shutter closed protectively on its darkened chambers. Towards the end of August, the whole region was ravaged by the drought. In the fields the millet stood high, but with the grain blackened and shrivelled as though touched by flame. The peasants were stricken with sudden fevers and sometimes with a kind of madness, that drove them along the highroads, howling and writhing, or struck them down, moaning like wounded animals, in the sun-scorched herbage of the ditches. The heavy, heat-laden air, from which the glowing nights gave no respite, persisted unbroken, scorching the lungs; and bodily discomfort, mingled with that of the mind, gave each day its full measure of anguish.

It was during this time that I once again encountered François Landargues, one day at the house of Mme. Livron, where I happened to be returning her last call. She is not one of Fabien's

patients, but limits herself to recommending him to her farm-hands or to some of the poor people who are pensioners on her charity. He contents himself with this, however, while waiting for bigger favours, and insists that I shall show the old lady very special attention.

Mme. Livron's house is situated quite low down upon the slope, with a terrace that is celebrated throughout the neighbourhood. From above its balustrades of brick and white stone, one can look down on the swift, blue waters of the steadily broadening Rhone. Beyond the river lies the Plain, with its grey willows, its supple poplars, its pale herbage; and when a puff of wind passes, swaying the whole country-side with one impulse, like a sheet of fluent, rippling silver, it seems to run beside the river, in its headlong course to the sea.

Mme. Livron was seated on this terrace in the dense shade formed by six large plane trees that mingled their branches and leaves; two other ladies were with her, old friends who had come from Avignon to see her; and beside them was François Landargues. Since my marriage he had been absent almost continually from Lagarde, travelling either for pleasure or for his health, and I had not once seen him. I had not seen him since that autumn evening when we stood beside a little bonfire of dead leaves, with its pungent smoke

eddyng around us and he had said to me: "Good-bye until to-morrow!" And now, after so many empty joys and empty sorrows I had so completely ceased to think of him that in meeting him again I felt only a slight surprise, a slight annoyance, perhaps, but nothing more.

Faultless, as always, in appearance, and still possessing that irritating charm which had lost its power to stir me, he had nevertheless aged considerably. His hair was beginning to turn grey; he looked thinner and more weary; and when he spoke each separate bone of his face formed a shifting, shining protuberance under the thin parchment-like skin. His eyes seemed larger and had acquired a sort of hard and feverish fixity. His lips were paler and tightly drawn, and the old-time smile which had not left him, twisted them into a sort of spasmodic and continuous grimace. Looking at him more closely, I was almost afraid of him, and I felt that his manner was hostile.

Greeting me with a bow he inquired ceremoniously after my health; and then in response to my own polite inquiries, said that he was extremely ill, but that he had had enough of travel and henceforth would stick fast at home. At that moment, Mme. Livron rose to conduct her friends to the other end of the terrace, where the view is finer, and he promptly crossed over and sat down by me. And then, as casually as though our

separation dated only from a week ago, he asked me:

"Well, Alvère, are you happy?"

"Very happy."

"Ah!" he remarked, "it took an effort to say that, and the effort showed. You will never make a good dissembler, my poor child. And yet you will soon be thirty years old, if I am not mistaken, and you ought to play the game better."

His tone was quite the same as in other days, only more disdainful and cutting. And he was still more cutting and disdainful when he inquired:

"Is your husband well?"

"Quite well."

"Business flourishing? . . . I should have said . . . but anyhow, it is flourishing?"

"Fairly so."

"It is a good season for him. Do you know that, thanks to the drought, the ponds have gone dry, the fishes are all dying and rotting there in the slime. Pestilential emanations are beginning to rise and spread, and it is predicted that if this weather continues we shall have the worst sort of epidemic. There is news to gladden the heart of a doctor who, like your husband, knows how to make the most out of his job."

Stressing the last word with deliberate insolence, he paused and continued to gaze at me in silence. But he saw clearly that henceforth I

should be deaf to anything his glance might say. Keenly irritated and in haste to avenge himself, he added, with a hard little laugh that seemed to spring from his throat:

"I hope that you have forgotten — while forgetting so many other things — the observations that I made to you in his regard. They were far from indulgent, as I recall them, and I ask your pardon . . . but I could not then foresee. . . ."

I rose without answering him, and as Mme. Livron asked me to have some refreshments, I followed her over to the little table where, along with Muscatel wine and tea-cakes, the first grapes of the season were served. François Landargues followed us, but he refused to take anything and withdrew almost at once.

*

* *

Whenever I returned from calling upon Mme. Livron, Fabien always questioned me minutely. So I naturally had to tell him about my meeting François Landargues, and he seemed quite pleased about it. "It is a happy accident," he declared, "a very happy accident. . . . Romain de Buire, whom I saw the other day, told me that he was soon expected home, but I did not think that it would be as soon as this, and the last thing I would have thought of was that you would have the luck to be there the very day he paid his first call on

Mme. Livron. . . . Things could not have turned out better."

Drawing up his chair to the table, laid for dinner, he added:

"Anyway, I have been expecting this for a long time."

Throughout dinner he was thoughtful and talked little. Afterwards he settled himself in the hard-backed rattan chair that he occupied every evening, and still continued to brood in silence. Guicharde, who had a slight headache, retired early, and we were left alone. Through the window the scorching air rolled in without relief, more heavily laden each day with all the unwholesome odours that hung stagnant in the narrow street, and in the night-time blue of the sky, where a yellow moon was blazing, there still continued an ardour without respite. Fabien smiled a long time into the smoke-clouds from his pipe. At last he declared:

"Everything is quite simple now. You must plan to see François again, which ought not to be difficult, and you must invite him to come and call on us. Mme. Landargues was the only one who stood in the way of closer relations between our families; but she is dead, and her obstinacy with her. There is no obstacle now to prevent your cousin — and consequently mine too — from dropping in frequently from now on."

In his eyes I saw that look of blind, tenacious determination, against which all my revolts spent themselves futilely. I answered simply:

"Have you forgotten that formerly . . . ?"

"I know," he said with some impatience, "that François found you attractive, which was quite natural, and that you used to take walks together. But you were both quite proper and discreet, all things considered, and I imagine that I was the only person around here who ever met you on those walks. It is all ancient history now, and little flirtations of that sort are of small importance. They are quickly forgotten, but they generally leave behind them a sympathy which a clever woman ought to know how to use to good advantage. Do you realise that Fardier is very old now, and near the end of his course? Mandel is already scheming to take his place, and not only with the Landargues . . . but through them he would get all the important practice of the district. Well, then! if we make the right moves, it is I who will win out, instead of Mandel. Do you realise also . . . ?"

He talked on and on . . . I let him say what he would, without replying. But at last, too tired and too irritated to bear it longer, I said:

"All right . . . it's understood . . . don't insist any further. I will ask François to come and see us . . . I will ask him."

Naturally, I did not intend to keep this promise. But Fabien now formed the habit, every evening when he came home, of searching for me all over the house, in great impatience. And the first question he asked me was :

“ What is the news? Have you seen him? ”

At last exasperation overcame my better judgment. I no longer tried to avoid François Landargues, and the first time that I ran across him, I said what I had been ordered to say. It was once again at the Place Ronde and near the old elm. A bell was just sounding the end of the afternoon service, with little muffled strokes, as though they were choked by the heat-laden air. Some old women were coming out of the church, obscure and whispering figures, whose slow, shuffling steps raised a dust. And the muffled sound of that bell and of those dragging footsteps have remained heavily mingled with the humiliation that crushed me down, when, after hearing my request, François turned his pitiless glance upon me.

Instantly he read the whole story: Fabien's calculations, his insistent demands, my futile revolt and my resigned submission; he extracted from it a violent and cruel amusement. And wishing to make this quite clear to me, he smiled his unkindest smile, and before speaking deliberately prolonged the silence between us.

"Why, certainly," he said at last, "I will go to see you . . . that is to say . . ."

He made a gesture towards his own house.

"I will come whenever you choose, to return the call that you were to have made upon me . . . and that I am still expecting."

Full of curiosity, spying upon us, those sombre old women had crept nearer and nearer. One of them, bolder than the rest, suddenly bobbed up, close beside us. No doubt, she had hoped to take us unaware and overhear some part of our interview. But, excusing herself quite humbly, she told François that she wanted to commend her son to his attention, as he was anxious to find employment at the Quarries. François was obliged to answer her, while I at once slipped away. That evening I was able to reply to Fabien's urgent questions:

"I have seen him again."

"Well?"

"I don't think that he will ever come to see us."

At this, Fabien flew into a rage, declaring that he was at a loss to understand such a refusal, and that I had evidently made some stupid blunder in giving the invitation.

CHAPTER X

IN the course of such scorching days as we were now enduring, it sometimes happens that hay, after it has been stacked, is all of a sudden seen to smoke and burst into flame. The slightest passing breeze fans this conflagration that no one has kindled, spreads it, sweeps it upward, carries away blazing wisps, and scatters them perilously at haphazard. In the same way, in little isolated towns, where boredom ferments, calumny is born without cause; it grows, all at once, scatters and falls back; and every one examines the scraps that happen to have landed on their window-ledge or on the bench in their garden.

The calumny which began covertly to couple together François' name and mine must have sprung from very small beginnings, perhaps from the whispers of those old women, coming out from evening service, who allowed an envious glance to steal from under a corner of their white bonnets. Or perhaps it came only from that languor which had begotten so many unhealthy dreams and foul emanations throughout the whole inactive and feverish town. The fact remains that the ugly rumour had begun to grow and spread, so quietly at

first that no one could have noticed. One evening, when Fabien returned home, he asked, almost with displeasure:

"Why didn't you tell me that you had seen Landargues again?"

"For the simple reason that I have not seen him again," I answered quietly.

"Is that so? I was told that you two were seen together, yesterday, walking on the road to La Bastide."

"Who told you that?"

"Bernard, the old pensioner, whom I attended yesterday. He had it from the brother of the woman who collects the mails."

"It's just a stupid blunder."

He believed me, and in any case he would have seen no harm in such a meeting. But why did people take it into their heads to spread a report that was not true? It proved clearly that they were gossiping about us, and in a malicious way which displeased Fabien. He remained surprised and perturbed throughout the whole evening.

It did not take him long, however, to forget this small occurrence as completely as I forgot it myself. But, as it happened, the next week I met François Landargues again, in the Rue des Licornes, which is bordered only by the high walls of gardens. He was staying at this time in his own house on the Place Ronde, and growing sicker

day by day, often finding himself too weak to go to the Quarries; and he continued to leave the entire care of the business to Romain de Buïres, as he had done during all his long absences. He himself roamed about the town at nightfall, seeking relief from his enforced idleness and feverish restlessness. Consequently, it was an almost daily occurrence for Guicharde to run across him, and nothing could be more natural than my meeting him once again.

He no sooner caught sight of me than, giving me no time to avoid him, he came rapidly forward and gripped me by the arm as he greeted me. I tried to free myself, but he kept too tight a hold. At this moment Mlle. Tarride opened the little door of her garden; she is a stupid, uncharitable person, with her mouth forever open and her eyebrows set very high in a low, scowling forehead. She gave us one look, at once dropped her eyes, and hurried away down the whole length of the garden wall.

“She is carrying the news,” said François, “the news that we are keeping tryst in little deserted streets, with no windows overlooking them. Immortal Gods! Have I compromised you? But what will your husband say? Is he jealous? Al-
vère, tell me . . . it would be so funny! Gourdon jealous! Jealous of me! . . . I really wonder. . . .”

He laughed. Then suddenly he became silent. A perverse curiosity, dangerous dreams, flickered in his haggard eyes, burning with fever.

"Your remarks are in bad taste. I don't like them," I said stiffly.

Thereupon I left him, and in order to avoid another meeting, made a pretext of the heat, from which I was slightly suffering, not to leave the house for several days. But Guicharde told me that François Landargues, with an invalid's capricious changefulness, had returned and installed himself in his home at La Cloche; so after that I occasionally went out with my sister and sat at nightfall in the garden attached to the Mondragone house, which is thrown open on fine days to the inhabitants of the town. In the sluggish air, not a breath of that good, fresh odour of growing things, which is given off by foliage after nightfall, reached us from the metallic boxwood and the yellowed plane trees. A few old women sat beside us, huddled together on the benches. I busied myself with thinking that some day I should be as old as they. Guicharde sat twisting some little withered leaves that crackled between her fingers. And neither of us spoke a word.

The few friends that we might have visited were away at the mountains. The town was empty. Nothing seemed to have come of that malicious gossip which had coupled my name with

that of François, and had now died out like many another rumour. Why then, in the midst of this dismal and oppressive tranquillity, did Fabien suddenly begin to give every sign of acute perturbation? There was absolutely nothing that he could have found to reproach me with; and since he placidly assumed that he inspired in me all the love that was needful, he could not be suffering from jealousy. Yet every day when he reached home he questioned me as to how I had spent my time, with an insistent minuteness that would have made me angry if I had not been so completely fagged out. During meals he scarcely spoke. Then, suddenly his brows would contract and his head would droop; and sometimes, for no cause at all, his closed fist would set the entire table in a quiver. Before we had fairly finished eating he would rise brusquely and begin to stride up and down the room; and sometimes his footfall was so heavy that the square tiles, trembling in their cement bed, would send up little clouds of fine red powder.

"What on earth is the matter? What can have happened?" I kept asking Guicharde, when we were alone.

She was as much astonished and disturbed as I. Fabien's irritation was such that we dared not question him regarding it. It increased day by day; his gestures, customarily moderate, became brusque to the point of incoherence. When he at-

tempted to move a chair aside he was likely to overturn it. One evening while pouring himself a drink he broke the glass. An almost savage anger, that was nevertheless crafty, and self-controlled, gleamed at times in his eyes, and then his features would become swollen and overspread with a feverish flush.

"He must be ill," Guicharde would say in explanation, "the glare of the roads is almost blinding, and he said yesterday that while he was driving his car, he had something like a touch of dizziness."

*

* *

My sister has made one friend at Lagarde, one single friend, of whom she is very fond. She is a Mlle. Jeannot, nearly fifty years of age, but very alert and intelligent, and curious about everything and everybody. She wears her hair in long bandeaux down the sides of her face, which is as smooth and peaceful as the faces of waxen saints. In her old dwelling in the Rue Puits-aux-Boeufs, there is always a table laid in the vast, humid parlour, with a collation for guests, who are always expected. There are many of them, every day, and from all four corners of the town they bring her the news for which she hungers, but which she is wise enough to use discretion in spreading further.

When Guicharde goes there, she settles herself down to spend the afternoon. But there was one day, during that wretched summer when, after setting out as usual, taking her work with her, she came home again before three o'clock; beneath the perspiration shining on her cheeks, her whole face was aflame with an indignation that amazed me. She snatched off her hat and flung it on the table; then, beating the air before her with her little black fan, she asserted:

"That François Landargues is a wretched beast!"

I was not surprised. I realised now that, for several days, through all my anxiety, I had been constantly expecting some one to utter that name. But I merely said:

"Well, what has happened now?"

Hereupon she sat down, drawing her chair close up to me, and repeated what Mlle. Jeanniot had known for a whole week and had at last made up her mind to tell her. She had heard it from one of her nephews, who visited friends of the Landargues, and of Romain de Buire, then from another person, and from still a third. But these little details are no longer clear in my mind. I remember only the main facts, and not the course they had taken in reaching me. I continued to hold my needle. Quite mechanically, with my gaze fixed far off, I took tiny stitches in the cloth

lying idly on my knees. And in the dim light of the hot room, with the shutters closed, I could hear the tremor of Guicharde's voice, close to my ear.

It seemed that François Landargues was boasting of my love for him . . . He insinuated that the adventure was an agreeable one, and he added with a laugh that Fabien Gourdon had not been, and never could be a dangerous obstacle. These calumnies, Mlle. Jeanniot declared, stopped short at a certain social stratum which had the good taste to judge them unworthy, and let them go no further. They could not harm me; and François Landargues' impudent cynicism was the only aspect of the whole matter that was sharply criticized.

"He is a scoundrel," repeated Guicharde, "a scoundrel, and crazy, besides. How dared he talk like that? And why?"

But I continued to feel no surprise. I recalled the look in his eyes, a sick man's look of utter boredom, and then the gleam of perverse animation that I suddenly saw dawn in them, an evil purpose that grew and took shape all the while that François kept demanding, "Is your husband jealous? Jealous of me . . . that would be comical!" It really would be comical in such a case, to see what would become of a certain Fabien Gourdon's submission and deference, which one could well afford to laugh at, if one's name hap-

pened to be Monsieur Landargues. What would he do? The whole interest of the game lay in that. So François had chosen to relieve his boredom this way, indifferent to the insults to which it exposed me, and evidently taking good care that all that he said should reach Fabien's ears. Yes, I understood all that . . . I understood also many other things, and when Guicharde repeated for perhaps the tenth time:

"He is crazy! What will Fabien say when he knows of it?"

I replied so slowly that my voice sounded calm, "I think that he knows of it already."

"Impossible!" she protested indignantly.

"He knows . . . he knows" . . . my voice continued to drag along, because while I uttered those little words I was thinking of so many other things. . . . "I think he does . . . indeed, I am sure of it. But he will never dare to say anything to François Landargues, never!"

"All the same," she murmured, more frightened perhaps by this supposition than by all the rest.

A thousand little sounds broke in upon the silence. It seemed as though we could fairly hear the tiles of the old roof crackling and splitting under the sun's rays.

"Listen . . . this evening . . . this very evening . . . in his presence. . . . I will allude

to all those ugly stories. Then we shall see. . . ."

"Well, just as you like."

Guicharde hesitated again.

"But if he first learns about it through me, what will happen?"

"Nothing . . . nothing . . . don't worry."

"I am almost afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"I don't know. . . ."

"Well, then?"

Long minutes passed between our brief phrases. Suddenly a captive dove, hanging in its osier cage on the wall of neighbouring house, awoke and began to roll forth its haunting lament, continuing endlessly. A strange foreboding took possession of us.

*

* *

*

That same evening there began to form upon the horizon the dense bank of fog which heralds the coming of the heavy autumn rains; and when we were seated at table, Guicharde, in order to avoid the temptation of speaking at once of the other matter, began by asking Fabien:

"Do you think that at last we are going to have some rain?"

"I haven't any idea," he answered.

"It would be high time. . . ."

"It would seem so."

And, in the act of cutting himself some bread, he did it with such awkward violence that he sliced the end of his finger.

"Leave me alone!" he ordered, as I started to rise and get a bowl and some bandages. He angrily bound his finger with his napkin, which was at once covered with large stains of blood. Guicharde was superstitious. She glanced at me, and I saw clearly that now that she was on the point of speaking, she hesitated more than ever. Yet her indignation had been too great to allow her to restrain herself entirely. Little by little she too betrayed her nervousness by her gestures. Finally, when dessert was served and Adélaïde had left the room, after placing a large platter of fresh almonds on the table, she made up her mind to speak.

"Fabien," she said resolutely, "do you know what I was told to-day?"

He glanced at her with evident uneasiness.

"It was in regard to François Landargues," my sister continued; "it appears that he has been talking about you."

Instantly Fabien's glance, which had been averted, was turned back upon her; this time it was almost menacing and as full of violence as a blow in the face.

"Hold your tongue!" he cried. "Hold your tongue!"

He rose, but remained standing before the table; a sort of shiver passed over him, and motionless though he was, he gave the appearance of a man engaged in a fierce struggle. I watched him quietly. A heavy night-moth was whirling clumsily around the lamp, and my thoughts were like that moth, uncertain and heavy in that atmosphere of storm and dread.

"Some one has told you already, I can see that," and now Guicharde threw aside all caution and gave free rein to her indignation. "Well, what are you going to do about it? It can't be allowed to go on."

"Hold your tongue!" repeated Fabien.

And as she, in her turn, rose to her feet, he advanced upon her, and seized her by the wrists; and before she had time, in her surprise and alarm to utter a word, he said, once again, very low, and in a hoarse, choking voice: "Hold your tongue! Have you lost your head? Can't you see that for days and days, I have been holding myself in, to keep from doing something desperate?"

He pushed her from him furiously. He had not removed his napkin, which still hung, all blood-stained, from his left hand. Suddenly, tearing it to pieces in his rage, he flung it to his feet, and his clenched fist shot forward as if into the face

of some hated enemy. For an instant he turned aimlessly around, panting, hesitating, exasperated. Then, at last, he left us, slamming the doors, and shut himself into his office. . . . And we heard stray bits of plaster rattling down behind the wall-paper loosened and bulging from the heat, the whole length of the old walls, shaken by the violence of his exit.

"Oh!" said Guicharde, who was now clinging closely to me, "you see, there was good reason to be afraid! What is going to happen next? He had death in his eyes!"

I remained quite indifferent.

"Don't alarm yourself . . . I know him too well. His bursts of temper mean little or nothing."

And I quietly began to crack myself a few almonds, and put a little salt at one side of my plate to help to bring out their flavour.

CHAPTER XI

IN spite of the fine self-control which I flattered myself that I possessed, I found it impossible, after such a scene, to go to sleep. Not daring to light the lamp, for fear of waking Fabien, already wrapt in heavy slumber, I found myself praying for the comfort of some sound, no matter how far off, that would give my weary brain the distraction of something to listen to. But I prayed in vain; for these nights in the provinces are the deadest nights in the world. Out in the open country, to be sure, the rustling of the leaves, the barking of a dog, the squeak of a field-mouse, the silvery chirp of a cricket down in the grass, add to these obscure hours the hidden animation of a thousand little lives, awake and restless. But from street pavings and house walls, from big, close-barred doors and heavy shutters, there rises through the silence of deserted streets nothing but more silence, heavier still.

Enduring it until I felt myself turning giddy, I waited for this interminable night to pass without ever once closing my eyes. Then, all of a sudden, on the stroke of two o'clock, it seemed a

blessed relief to hear in the far, far distance the sound of hurried footsteps, pounding hard.

I sat up in bed, to listen better. Was it a belated lover or a morning workman ahead of time? Forgetting my own troubles for the moment, I amused myself with idle fancies. The steps drew rapidly nearer. Now they sounded like a man running. I ceased trying to imagine anything. A vague premonition set me trembling. I waited . . . were the steps coming to our door?

They did come to the door and stopped. Immediately the knocker fell heavily three times in succession, and I cried out:

"Fabien! Fabien!"

It was not the first time that a similar awakening had surprised us in the middle of the night. Fabien, accustomed to such rousings, had his eyes open at once and his brain clear.

"Well," he said, "some one is sick and they have sent for me. It isn't worth while shouting like a crazy woman."

He calmly lit the lamp. While he waited with exasperating patience for the little flame to work its way around the circular wick, the knocker sounded again five or six times, and the hurried strokes, with no interval between them, made one single and prolonged rumble, vibrant and tragic.

"Hurry! Fabien, hurry!"

"How silly you are!" he said shortly.

He dressed and took time to open the closet and take out a muffler, which he knotted around his neck. Finally he left the room, taking the lamp with him, and descended the stairs tranquilly, just as the knocker recommenced its desperate hammering on the front door. Almost at once Guicharde entered my room, candle in hand.

"Well," she said, "your husband has gone down at last! I thought that he hadn't heard. And yet what a racket!"

"Did it wake you?" I asked.

"No, I wasn't asleep yet," she answered, as she crossed the room and sat down on my bed.

I leaned toward her and was about to rest my head upon her shoulder when she quivered and rose to her feet. Fabien came running upstairs, shouting orders in a hoarse, perturbed voice.

"My boots . . . my cape-coat . . . my cap . . . quick!"

I rose hastily. His face, lit only by Guicharde's candle, and criss-crossed with heavy shadows impressed me as full of menace. Even as I rushed toward the dressing-room, I asked:

"Who is sick?"

He only repeated:

"Quick! Quick!" And he leaned against the wall, panting for breath.

"Do you want me to go down and open the barn door?" asked Guicharde.

He was already lacing at haphazard, skipping two holes out of three, the heavy cowhide boots that I had brought him and that served for these night-time visits.

"I am not using the car . . . it's quite close by . . . or at least . . . it isn't far."

Some emotion that I could not understand, choked his speech and made his movements clumsy. I asked once again:

"Who is sick?"

He glanced at me; but his eyes had a sort of fixed look and did not seem to see me. After a moment his lids fluttered nervously and turning away without answering, he said, flinging the order at Guicharde:

"My instrument case . . . the little one with the needles; and the black box in the closet behind my desk; here is the key."

"The black one?" repeated Guicharde prudently, for she knew that each of the four boxes contained different remedies.

"Yes, the black one . . . hurry!"

She left the room and I hurried after her. Downstairs in the vestibule the lamp had been placed on a little table and shed its light on an old man, who remained standing with his arms crossed. Although there were three chairs for the use of waiting patients, he refused to sit down,

so great was his impatience, and the heel of his heavy peasant shoe kept up a ceaseless tapping on the tiled floor. In fact, his entire body was visibly quivering from his shoulders down to his huge hands, hanging stupidly at his sides, and wide-spread in helpless horror.

"Excuse me," said Guicharde, passing in front of him, "I must take the lamp for a moment."

Taking the lamp she passed on in the direction of Fabien's office, while I remained in the dark beside the trembling man. I too was shivering, and my shivers like his kept on and on. And the continual sound of his heel rattling against the tiles, rasped my nerves to such a degree that I finally heard myself saying, under my breath:

"Keep quiet! Oh, please keep quiet!"

I suppose that I did not really utter these words. But I did ask and this also in a very low tone:

"Who is sick?"

"M. François Landargues," said the man briefly, "a worse attack than ever . . . I ran for M. Fardier . . . he was visiting another patient . . . way off . . . down at the Islands. . . . Then, M. Romain told me I would have to come here."

The man gave a final stamp of his foot, more furious than ever, and started to walk toward the door.

"Oh, why doesn't the Doctor hurry? With attacks like this, you never come out of them if you're not cared for in time."

"He is coming," I said, "he is coming."

I turned and walked in the direction where I saw the light shining from under the office door. I entered and steadied myself by holding on to the edge of the table.

"Guicharde . . . it's François Landargues who is sick . . . that is why they have sent for Fabien."

She was in the act of buckling a strap that bound together the black box and the instrument case. She raised her head with a start, and the tongue of the buckle began to dance in front of the little round holes in the leather without being able to find its way into a single one of them.

"Oh!" she said, in a hushed, horrified voice, "but it is impossible! . . . It is simply impossible! . . . Why did they send for him? . . . There are other doctors in Lagarde. . . . Mandel doesn't live so very far off. . . . The man must go for him. . . . I am going to tell him so."

She was rushing out, when she ran squarely into Fabien, who was just entering and had overheard her.

"What were you going to tell him?" he asked brutally. "It's none of your business! Is everything ready?"

He himself finished buckling the strap, but his hands were even more nervous and awkward than Guicharde's. At last all was ready. He took the packet under his arm, buttoned his coat precipitously and then, seeing the utter consternation on our faces, he cried:

"Whatever is the matter with you two? What do you look so dumbfounded about?"

He passed out, but turned back to add, almost solemnly:

"Isn't it my duty to go?"

The office door slammed behind him, and almost immediately afterwards, the front door. I was still leaning against the table and Guicharde continued to stand at the opposite side. The lamp, which contained very little oil, had begun to smoke. I stared fixedly at its smouldering wick, from which a feeble flame rose fitfully. It gave out an atrocious smell that blended with all the drugs and poisons contained in the little medicine closet, the door of which had remained open.

"He is sublime," sighed Guicharde at last, with characteristic exaltation.

"Whom do you mean?" I asked in bewilderment.

"Why, your husband," she said, "your husband. . . ."

And she took three steps forward, as though she would have liked to seize and shake me.

"Are you asleep, Alvère? Don't stare at the light like that! Your eyes will be all dazzled."

Then, joining and clasping her thin hands, which were little by little becoming like servants' hands, with a rough skin and heavy prominent veins, she continued slowly:

"Yesterday he hated that man . . . I saw that plainly . . . he could have killed him. . . . And now, because it is his duty . . . that was what he said, and it is very fine."

I did not even stir. Presently she came and took me by the arm.

"Come, let's try to get a little sleep. . . . Ah! my heart is somewhat lighter! It looks to me as though everything was going to turn out all right. François Landargues will apologise . . . Fabien will forgive him."

Her active and simple imagination was already carrying her away. She returned to her room and I to mine. I threw myself on my bed.

I tried to dread nothing, to hope for nothing, to think of nothing. Nevertheless, the darkness hung heavy on my sleeplessness even more so than before, and I waved my hand sometimes as if to brush away this darkness from my face. Finally a pale glimmer began to appear and spread across the space of my window. A little later a wagon clattered along the paving with a great noise of loose iron joints and of tin cans rattling together.

. . . The milk-woman from La Bastide. . . . So it must be six o'clock . . . six o'clock already! Why had Fabien not returned? The pale glimmer between the cracks of the wooden shutters had turned to sunshine, and throughout the length of the Rue des Massacres all the other shutters were being slammed back against the walls. Below me I could hear Adèlaïde moving the furniture, to sweep the parlour. She was talking through the window to women who passed by; she was saying: "It is a fine day." I rose in my turn to dress.

At this moment I heard the front door open violently. It was closed again almost at once, and so heavily that it must have struck the wall and rebounded. The interval was so brief that whoever entered must have flung himself precipitously between the two bounds of that slamming door. What had he to tell us, that he should be in such haste? I waited . . . but all at once my patience failed me and I called out:

"Fabien!"

He made no answer, and I was surprised not to hear him coming up, as he always did, quite noisily. Guicharde had just opened the window on the stair-landing and remained there like a cat, a long, thin black cat, blinking her eyes in the morning sunshine. I asked her:

"Who came in? I thought it was Fabien."

"So it was," she said, "but he has shut himself up in his office."

"Shut himself up? Why?"

"I don't know. I am wondering how things turned out. Have you slept at all?"

"Do we need grapes?" called Adélaïde through the balusters of the stairs. "They are twelve sous. And Milo is here with some eels, do you want any?"

"I will come down," said Guicharde, "I will come down."

And turning to me:

"Lazy girl, hurry up and finish dressing. Fabien will tell us all about it during breakfast."

I obeyed her. Some pigeons were walking on the roof. When the sound of the cold water splashing over me had ceased, I heard the little scratching noise of their stiff claws on the sun-baked tiles.

Why had Fabien not come up yet? What was he doing? A heavy mist enveloped the sun. I found it difficult to breathe and my hands were burning. At last I was dressed, in my every-day dress of coarse linen, with narrow grey stripes, that looked trim and neat and would not soil easily. "Is he still in his office?" And in my anxious curiosity it occurred to me to steal a secret glimpse at him. From the time of that Gourdon who was a notary, the same room which was to-

day Fabien's office had served as a study. In order to be able to supervise the clerks, there had been constructed on the staircase, on a level with the fifteenth step going down, a little peep-hole which pierced the wall of the study near the ceiling. I left my bedroom, and when I reached that fifteenth step, I knelt down on the well waxed stair.

The small but somewhat rusted latch gave no sound under my cautious hand. The first thing I perceived was a nauseous odour from the lamp which, some time during the night must have smouldered and filled the room with smoke. The window had not been open; and the shutters were still closed, yet not so tightly but what enough daylight filtered in through the dimness to allow me to perceive my husband sitting before the table with his head in his two hands. One of the narrow rays that crossed the room suspended its dancing motes directly above those hands; and the hands themselves, terribly pale and luminous, were the sole objects that were clearly distinguishable about his whole vague form, huddled against the table and seemingly unconscious. I thought to myself:

“He is asleep.”

✓ But those hands were not the peaceful hands on which a tired head seeks repose. They were twisting, or rather they had been twisting; they gripped each other, or rather they must have been

gripping each other. Now they no longer moved, but their motionless rigidity, the white protuberance of the bones at the joints of the bent fingers expressed something terrifying. . . . And after staring at him intently I felt that my own hands were spasmodically gripping and wringing each other in their turn. I wanted to run, yet I could not even descend the few remaining stairs except with extreme slowness and leaning on the rail.

In the dining-room the heavy china cups were already set out on the blue-squared table-cloth, together with the bread and butter. This room looked out upon the Rue des Massacres. Through the somewhat faded muslin curtains the market women could be seen as they passed by, calling out their figs and fresh almonds, their fine eggs and apples. And there stood Guicharde with fear-stricken eyes and a face so white that it frightened me quite as much in the full light of day, as my husband's white hands had frightened me in the gloom of the adjoining room.

What evil spell had taken possession of the entire house? Yet, even as I wondered, it came my turn to succumb to it. I felt a premonition dawn upon me . . . and I knew! I really think that I must have uttered a cry and stretched out my two wide-open hands in front of me before Guicharde, seeing me come in, had time to say:

“François Landargues died last night!”

"He . . . died?"

I managed to pass around the table and came close to her.

"Guicharde, how did he die?"

"I don't know."

Her voice barely passed between her rigid lips. Yet she did know. . . . I saw clearly that she knew. But what was there for her to know?

"For pity's sake, tell me!"

At this moment she found herself obliged to sit down, and this sign of weakness on the part of my strong Guicharde sapped the little remnant of courage I was trying to muster. I broke down altogether and clung to her shoulder, begging her:

"Tell me, Oh, tell me!"

"Ah, but what is there to tell? The attack was exceptionally severe, and it is possible that he would have died in any case. But after all . . . Dr. Fardier got there later . . . only a little later . . . but it was too late. And perhaps Fabien made some mistake with the hypodermic. . . ."

"On purpose!" I cried. "He did it on purpose!"

Her gesture was vague, but there was something terrible in the slow reluctance of her words:

"Why no . . . see here! . . . They only say that . . . he bungled."

“ Who dares say that . . . Who dares? ”

“ Everybody,” she cried, pointing to the street with a wide, vague gesture, and ending by bursting into sobs.

CHAPTER XII

I SHRANK back from the window and fought down the impulse to insist that the curtains should be close drawn. I felt as though all those women with baskets on their arms, and even the few ladies whom I could distinguish by their parasols or bonnets, were preparing to gather before our door and point a scornful finger at it. Even Adélaïde's discretion in not putting the milk on the table at the usual hour, I assumed, in my injustice, to be an evidence that she shared in the general indignation. No doubt the girl had left the house already; and we were left alone, Guicharde and I, alone with that man, in the next room, with his face hidden on his clasped hands.

"What do you think, yourself? For my part, I believe that he did it on purpose . . . I am sure of it . . . He killed him on purpose . . . Yes, he killed him."

Guicharde had risen and was clinging to me, and it was she who breathed these words against my cheek. Oh! my Guicharde, always reasonable and impulsive at one and the same time, seeing everything in simple terms, yet with profound emotion! Life agitated her in much the same way that a hand in a narrow basin starts little

waves coming and going, from one margin to the other. Last night she thought my husband sublime, because he uttered a few words that might be so construed; and now with equal vehemence, she declared in horror:

“He killed him!”

“Do you think so, Guicharde? Do you really think so?” Then in my turn, I repeated very low: “He killed him! . . . He killed him! . . . Fabien Gourdon, Doctor Gourdon, my husband, killed . . . *dared* to kill Monsieur François Landargues!”

And I asked once again:

“Do you think so, Guicharde? Do you think so?”

Already regretting her words, she began to temporise: “I don’t know what to think!” But now, without stopping to question her further, I seized her by the hand, because through the window I had seen three women stopping, and I imagined that they were watching the house. It frightened me to feel their eyes upon us, and even more to feel that I was much too near to Fabien.

“Let’s get away from here!”

“But where to?”

“Come with me!”

I drew her along with me. Fabien was likely, at any moment, to seek me in the bedroom, so it did not even occur to me to take refuge there.

We ascended both flights of stairs, to the upper floor, and there at the further end of the old garret was a little boarded-in room with whitewashed walls, in which we had stored away the few bits of furniture that had come to us from Mamma, and which Fabien did not consider good enough to be seen in his house. On the inner side of the door there was a dilapidated old bolt, the screws of which no longer held. None the less I slid it into its socket. The threatening storm-clouds, denser and heavier than the night before, were again spreading over the whole sky; through the unglazed garret window, whose wooden shutter hung from its rusty hinge, the stifling heat entered our retreat and steadily accumulated.

Guicharde seated herself in the little chair where Mamma used to sit when she was learning book-keeping from her Uncle Jarny, and I sat on a trunk that held her poor black dresses and her last hat. We said nothing further; and there was not a thing stirring below us in that whole silent house. Towards mid-day, market time being over, the sounds that had reached us across trees and walls died away along the roads leading out into the country. Then, just below us, the hurried panting of a motor broke the silence. I heard the creaking of the big bolt on the barn door. Then the horn sounded at the corner of the street.

"He is going away!" I said to Guicharde quietly.

"Well, let him go!" she answered.

And we breathed more freely, in spite of the storm, that was already upon us. It brooded, however, more than two hours longer before it broke. As I watched the sky darken, I murmured from time to time:

"It is night; it is night already!"

"No," Guicharde would answer, "it is only three o'clock . . . it is only four o'clock."

At last the first flare of lightning lit up our garet window, and the roofs beyond, and the whole horizon. The entire heavens were torn asunder by a formidable and prolonged peal of thunder. The first rain-drops, large and rapid, pattered so violently on the tiles above our heads that they seemed to be flying into splinters.

I dislike thunder-storms; when one comes, the only way I can endure it is by taking refuge in the lowest rooms of the house, and I ask Adélaïde at least half a dozen times if all the windows are close shut. But on this wretched day I seemed incapable of receiving any outside impressions or of feeling any physical sense of fear; I was ceaselessly hearing an inner tumult, far louder than the voice of the heavens; I was ceaselessly blinded by a more appalling flare.

"Aren't you afraid?" asked Guicharde,

amazed at my calmness. "Don't you want to go downstairs?"

"No . . . no . . . I am not afraid . . . we are quite safe here."

But all at once some one tried to open our door, and not succeeding, gave a hurried knock. Then the same fear which prevented me from becoming frightened by the storm, brought me to my feet with a gasp. I cried out:

"Oh! Go away! Go away!"

"Don't be foolish," said Guicharde, "don't be foolish, it isn't . . ."

"It is Adélaïde," cried the fresh, young voice of our servant. "Look here, ladies, is there any sense in your staying up here in such weather? And what is more, without eating a mouthful all day long?"

She continued, after Guicharde had opened the door:

"And what's it all about? . . . I wish you'd tell me! M. François Landargues is dead, and what of it? As they were saying just now at Mme. Favier's grocery, that sort of thing may happen any day to a doctor. And as they say besides: it was annoying, of course, for Dr. Gourdon . . . it was hard luck, if you like . . . but nothing more."

"Nothing more . . . " repeated Guicharde thoughtfully.

And the simple good sense of these words already comforted her.

"She is right . . . she has done me good," she told me as we descended the stairs behind Adélaïde. The girl had displayed real heroism in coming up in such a storm to look for us in the garret; and in her fear of thunder she now galloped down the stairs three steps at a time.

She had laid out a little lunch for us in the close-shut kitchen. I took only a cup of tea. But Guicharde's appetite was coming back. Adélaïde's blunt, sensible remarks continued to reassure her, and it gradually became evident to her that in the eyes of the world François Landargues' death was expected and natural. We had been quite ridiculous in not taking that view of it at once; and she told me so in a low tone before half an hour had passed, almost smiling again, so greatly relieved had she begun to feel.

The storm was passing. Towards seven o'clock we decided to open the windows, and I left the kitchen. I was startled at seeing Fabien standing in the vestibule. Doubtless he had just come in, for his clothing and his face were streaming with water. He asked me precipitately:

"Who has been here to-day?"

"Why, nobody . . . nobody at all."

*

* *

He at once went up to our bedroom, but I myself could not make up my mind to enter it. So Guicharde took me in to spend the night with her. Half reassured herself, she sought to convince me that we ought to be wholly so; yet even while she was trying to prove the absurdity of our first fears, she fell asleep. But it was only at day-break that I closed my eyes, and when I awoke, my sister was no longer beside me.

She soon came up again, however, and I saw that she was quite cheerful; she had breakfasted with Fabien, who still seemed worried, but on the whole quite calm, so far as she could judge, much calmer than he had been in many days. Naturally enough, she had asked him no questions, and they had talked only of the bread, which was not well baked that morning, and of a panel in the sideboard which the mice had been gnawing during the night.

"He agrees with me that we ought to keep a cat. I don't like cats; but in a house as old as this is, there is no doing without one."

Then dropping this subject, she proceeded to retail to me all the news that Adélaïde had gathered in the course of her morning errands. The whole town was naturally talking of nothing else than François Landargues; but in its passage from street to street over night, most of the gossip had become oddly distorted. There were some who

insisted that only Dr. Fardier had been in attendance at La Cloche during the last crisis, and in his agitation he had sent not only for Fabien but for Dr. Mandel as well. Others recalled how François' own father had died, as suddenly and at almost the same age. And there was special interest shown in Romain de Buïres, who would now come into a large inheritance, and was a very lucky man not to have been kept waiting a good deal longer.

"So you see," repeated Guicharde, "you see very clearly that no one else has even dreamed of the absurdities that so needlessly frightened us yesterday."

Seeing that I was still depressed, she began maternally to do up my hair, just as she used to do when I was a child; with my arms resting idly on my lap, I watched my white face in the glass, and my eyes that had not yet lost their frightened look. Just as Guicharde was slipping the last hairpin into place, Adélaïde came running up to say that Dr. Fardier had just called and that Fabien had shut himself in with him in his office.

"No doubt," said Guicharde, determined to let nothing further worry her, "they have certain matters of detail to discuss."

And she asked me: "When are you going down?"

"I won't see Fabien!" I answered, "I won't see him!"

I could not help myself, however, for just after the mid-day *Angelus* had sounded Dr. Fardier left the house, and almost at once my husband called me. I still hesitated. He repeated my name twice, in a dull tone and without impatience. Then I went downstairs, and found him seated before his table, just as I had seen him the previous day; his shoulders sought the support of the chair, and looked narrower than usual, and his head was thrust forward and was so pale as to be almost pitiable, while his eyes were unnaturally wide open and somewhat staring.

He sought for a full minute before he found his opening phrase, and then, no doubt embarrassed by the long silence between us, he started talking precipitately:

"To begin with, what has ailed you ever since yesterday? I am at a loss to understand your attitude towards me. I have had a misadventure, a piece of hard luck, if you choose to call it so, but only what we doctors are exposed to any day. François Landargues was beyond help. I saw that plainly the moment I got there. Nevertheless, I used heroic measures to save him. Fardier told me so again just now. He told me so himself. . . . He came to see me. . . . A fine man,

all things considered. We had a long talk. And the upshot was. . . . He says I am a sick man, a very sick man. You know how nervous and over-worked I have been for some time past. What I need now is rest, immediate rest . . . Fardier advises me to leave for Avignon this very day."

"To-day?"

"Yes, this evening. . . . Why do you look so strange, with the same haggard look on your face that you had yesterday when I came home? . . . I don't want to think that this death has left you heart-broken! Then, what is the matter? Why do you look at me like that? What are you thinking of?"

His whole upper body was straining towards me, across the table. A look of fear and mistrust could be plainly read in his eyes. I turned my head away.

"Nothing . . . I was thinking of nothing at all. . . . Then you must leave to-night?"

"Must?" he repeated, continuing to watch me disquietly, "there is no question of must. I have had good advice, and I am following it."

"Very well. . . ."

In my haste to escape from his presence, I asked no further questions.

"I will get everything ready."

"Wait a moment," he said, "wait. I want

He hesitated; he began once more to droop his head. He was frightfully pale. One of his hands hung by his side, and all the blood of his whole being seemed to have taken refuge in that inert, red hand, in which every vein was swollen. And once more his words came with a feverish impetuosity.

"You must go with me, Alvère. In that way, everybody will understand more readily. Everybody will be convinced that I am really sick. As a matter of fact, I am sick, I really am. That terrible night finished me. So, I am going away . . . and you are going with me . . . to take care of me. Putting it that way, it all sounds natural, doesn't it? Quite natural!"

But his glance, which was anxiously questioning me, began once more to inspire me with terror, and he repeated in a muffled voice:

"What is the matter with you?"

"I don't know . . ." and like him, I spoke very low. "I don't know what would be the natural thing to do . . . I don't know what people would understand . . . But I am not going with you. . . . I am not going."

"Why not? Why not?"

I saw plainly that his narrow and tenacious obstinacy had become weak and incoherent. I repeated:

"I am not going."

Leaving the room, I called Adélaïde, to tell her to go to the garret and find the hand luggage. I meant to pack at once and have Fabien start as soon as possible. . . . Oh! to have him go!

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN I entered the bedroom it was still strewn with last night's disorder. Mechanically and without looking at anything, hurriedly and without definite plan, I went to one of the wardrobes. I opened it and began to sort out some linen. But I soon found myself obliged to sit down and press my temples between my two hands.

He was a murderer! He was a murderer! Hour by hour, ever since the previous night, my suspicions had ceaselessly drawn me towards that conviction, and now I had reached it. He was a murderer! Perhaps he had actually committed the terrible deed; or perhaps during a monstrous minute he had merely felt the desire to kill, and had allowed death to carry off in his presence, a life that he might have saved. He was a murderer! I knew it. . . . *I knew it!* What weight could Guicharde's opinion or that of the village gossips have against this certainty? No doubt, it was fortunate that no one had suspicions, or at least that no one appeared to have. But that was not the only thing that counted. What had actually taken place — not round about the

dying man — but within the soul of the man with him? Who would ever know the secret purpose, the hidden movement of the inner being, which determined all other movements in their manifest and deceptive forms? Why, even Fabien himself. . . . One can tell a man: "You have made a mistake." One can say to him even more harshly: "You are a bungler." But when all appearances are merely those of mistakes and bungs, one can add nothing further, nothing . . . except: "Be off with you! Leave the country for a time, it will be better so."

Who could tell? Nobody. But for my own part I was sure, only too sure! I went over in memory the events of the last few days: Fabien's painful humiliation and constant irritability, ending at last in his outbreak at dinner; and his great agitation when he was summoned in the night to attend that man. But at last he had experienced a brusque revulsion, and what he had felt for one brief minute, what he had desired and resolved to do, meant that henceforth that minute would cast its shadow down his pathway of life, stretching on and on to the very door of his tomb.

I thought to myself, "How I should suffer, if I still loved him, if I ever had found it possible to love him!" And the horror which, ever since yesterday had brooded all around me, without

ever actually touching me, now suddenly closed in . . . I sprang up, wholly incoherent, and began to pace up and down the chamber, which only yesterday I could not bring myself to enter. Now for the first time I began to realise how it looked in its riotous disorder. I began to notice the bed with its rumpled bed-clothes, the crushed and shapeless pillow on the carpet beside two books taken up and rejected one after the other, and the candle so far burnt down that the porcelain bobèche had blackened under the flame; and there, too, were the clothes that Fabien had worn during his dash through the storm, still damp and strewn at random on floor and furniture; the grey overcoat trailing at the foot of the commode; and a chair that had been overturned by the impact of a waistcoat flung at it too forcefully from a distance.

In the presence of all this disorder, pervaded by the sad, damp odour of those scattered garments, I formed some idea of what his lamentable flight must have been like, across the open country that ran rivers and spit flame, while his eyes were blinded, and his shoulders shook under each bound of the car, while the very ground seemed to slip and turn aside beneath the wheels. Where could his thoughts have been, all the while that he continued to flee like this until night shut down, despite the storm and the danger? Where were his

thoughts throughout the night, while the candle slowly burned itself down, and after it had gone out? — For a long time past, with the sense of estrangement which had grown upon me, I had ceased to ask, "What is he thinking of?" But now, all of a sudden, I found myself searching, divining, and fitting together one after another, those terrible thoughts of his!

Forcing myself to my task, although all my movements were uncertain and clumsy, I began to journey back and forth between the bureau and the open valise, folding suits and undergarments. And all the time those thoughts of Fabien's continued to rise up and make me giddy.

They took shape within me, just as they must have done in him. I repulsed them, I pleaded with them, I yielded to them at last, just as he must have done. All of a sudden, the thought of the family's good name, an honourable family, prudent down to its slightest acts, came upon me with crushing force. I learned for the first time the sense of stupor one may feel in the presence of one's own acts, the horror that will never cease, the remorse which, when once it has begun to feed upon you, will bite deeper and deeper every day. I learned to know all this, I experienced all this, and yet out of it all something more was taking shape, which I had yet to learn.

I had knelt down to arrange some articles in the

inner pocket of the valise. 'As I rose, I faced Fabien who had just come into the room. At once I started to go out. But he did not notice my movement.

"Well," he said in that hesitating tone which he had newly acquired, "then you won't . . . ?"

" . . . ?"

"Go with me?"

My certainty of his crime was now even more complete than before when he first made this request, and there was nothing for me to do but make the same answer. How was it, then, that all at once I found myself compelled to say:

"Perhaps. . . ."

Instantly I tried to recall the word:

"That is to say . . ."

But he refused to listen to anything beyond this semblance of a promise. A contented look, the first in many hours, came over his face.

"Oh," he said in a relieved tone, "that would be ever so much better, don't you see . . . ?"

And he couldn't help adding,

"On account of what people will think."

"Hush! . . . Don't say any more . . . don't explain. . . . Besides. . . ."

But from that moment, though still haggard, he was visibly calmer, and talked of my going with him as a settled thing. In vain I fought, although I was not fighting against him. Something un-

known, to which I finally yielded, was forcing me to submit. I tried to believe, however, that I was still hesitating. I hesitated while packing my own luggage. I hesitated while giving my last directions to Guicharde. And I think that in my utter bewilderment I imagined I was still hesitating when I was seated opposite Fabien in the railway compartment which we had to ourselves, and saw the well known roads and familiar trees already gliding past and fleeing from me.

When the train started my husband had given one deep sigh. Fairly calm now, yet too visibly forcing himself to be so, he held himself very upright and read a paper. Turning from him, I watched the autumn night that was beginning to spread over the land. Already it had robed the blue cypress trees in black, and the misty olives had caught and held it in their branches. And the sheep moving past in little close-packed flocks, bore it on their shaggy, grey backs. But the big-leaved plane trees, the almost bare poplars, and all the bushy growth amassed along the borders of the fields clung to the precious gold that covered them, and still retained its brightness to the last. Then they yielded in their turn. Night shut them in, and took with them the cottages of stones and yellow clay, the women returning home, along the roads, the little children playing before the doors. And finding myself deprived of the

support furnished by all these things, I must needs turn back towards Fabien.

He was still holding his paper before him, but was no longer reading, although the little lamp in the ceiling afforded a sad and yellow light. His figure had bent and drooped; his shoulders were hunched, his neck strained forward in agonised suspense, and above the unseen paper his dilated eyes were set in a fixed stare.

“He sees François Landargues again . . . he sees him again.”

But at that moment his glance encountered mine and took on the look of perturbed mistrust that I now seemed at moments to inspire in him. So, feigning drowsiness, I closed my eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

THE journey lasted three long hours, during which I did not utter a word. And nothing that happened, neither the sudden stops at little stations in the night-time, nor the brusque entrance of a traveller, or the noisy exit of another, could induce me to raise my tight-shut eyelids. Fabien, seated facing me and equally motionless, guarded a similar silence. But we had no sooner entered the suburbs of Avignon than he was on his feet, collecting our luggage, even before the train had slackened speed; and I knew quite well that he had not slept, any more than I had.

There was nothing to be seen in the deserted streets save the white oases formed by the electric lamps; and when a metallic rustling passed through the leaves on the trees, the sudden dancing of their shadows against the walls was the sole visible sign of motion. It was late, and the heavy storm of yesterday had permeated the air with the first cool freshness of autumn. In the modest hotel to which Fabien took me we were served with a very poor supper of a meat-pie, with olives and goats'-milk cheese. The bedrooms smelled

of coarse soap, stale tobacco and the rancid oil with which the red flooring had been polished. And the utter mediocrity of this night's lodging at last forced from us the first words we had spoken.

Our first task was to find lodgings where we could pass the few weeks of our prospective stay, and we set about it the very next morning. Fabien had some friends in the city who might have given us useful advice. But he did not suggest this, and understanding only too well that he did not wish at present even to think of them, I was careful not to remind him. While he consulted the agencies, that are situated in the Place de l'Horloge, I went my own way, at haphazard, through little side streets that are so noisy and crowded as they approach the heart of the city, and that seem to hug their old walls in profound silence, as they withdraw from it. And although I was still in such a bewildered state that everything I did astonished me, sometimes to the point of stupefaction, I nevertheless succeeded that very first morning in discovering just the place we needed.

It was an old house in the Rue Trois-Faucons, a narrow house with a Romanesque door, the knocker of which was formed of two intertwining serpents. It belonged to an antiquarian named Chayère, who kept a shop near the church of St. Agricole and stored his merchandise in this house.

The rooms had stone floors laid in black and white squares, and were occupied by a whole regiment of wardrobes and clocks, tables astride of commodes, arm-chairs holding other chairs turned upside-down; and upon entering, one saw nothing but a pell-mell of polished panels and tarnished gildings, a scaffolding of bent or twisted table-legs, while from the ceiling hung little candelabra with dusty crystals, and church lamps on whose sides were tarnished angels of silver or bronze. But on the second floor two rooms were empty, and adjoining them was a little kitchen. The rooms still had frescoes on the ceiling, and little squares of greenish glass in their ancient windows, and they looked out upon a deep, moist garden, which could be reached from the street level by a long flight of stone steps.

Chayère consented to rent us these rooms and succeeded within two hours in rendering them habitable, thanks to a few pieces of furniture drawn from his reserve stock. He installed a Directoire bed, whose grey finish was ornamented with a blue tracery, an acacia-wood table large enough to take our meals from, a commode made in Arles, a wardrobe that came from Aix, some chairs, two lounges, the upholstery of which had split and exuded black horse-hair mingled with straw. He draped the windows with damask curtains that when spread out looked as though in-

laid with the sky itself, so worn and transparent was the warp. Lastly, he told me of one woman who could supply us with a little household linen, and another with table and kitchen utensils.

I worked the entire day with that man, so that by evening everything was ready. Fabien meanwhile was roaming the length and breadth of the town. He came in as evening was closing down, and without noticing a thing seated himself in an arm-chair near the wide open window. A delicious odour of expiring autumn drifted in from the little deep-shadowed garden, shut in between high walls, on which a few belated roses were still blooming. Looking, as it seemed to me, even more exhausted and miserable than the day before, Fabien remarked:

"That garden reeks with dampness and rotting leaves. The whole building must be unhealthy. . . . At all events. . . ."

I murmured:

"It's only for a few days."

He made no answer. I added in slightly louder tone:

"Isn't it?"

"I have no idea," he said, "I really have no idea."

I may have sighed or made some little gesture. Perhaps I may also have committed the imprudence of glancing at him. Thereupon that irri-

tability which was gradually becoming a symptom of his condition, made him turn upon me, once more mistrustful, almost hostile:

"And besides, keep quiet!" he cried. "Don't question me! We are here. That is well enough. That is sufficient. I don't want to hear any more talk about anything. I forbid you. Not a word, do you understand? . . . not a question . . . Never! Never! . . . Not a word."

He waved his feverish hand threateningly before him.

"Not a word! . . . Never!"

I repeated:

"No . . . no . . . never."

And from that moment I began to observe an absolute silence, the kind of silence he demanded, not only regarding what may have happened at Lagarde during that terrible night, but also as regards ourselves, our slightest thoughts, our dismal journey. Fabien frightened me, but not in the same fashion as he had done the previous day, and I was unable to explain what could be the obscure reasons that now made it possible for me to remain with him.

* * *

He at once formed the habit of setting out each morning as soon as he awakened, for interminable walks through the suburbs, and out into the coun-

try. By this time we had a woman who came in to do the housework. But she could give me only a few hours a day; she had to leave before noon, leaving the dinner ready to serve. After she had gone I laid the table-cloth, set out the dishes and waited. At last Fabien would return, quite late, and wearing on his features that look of suffering, that air of bewilderment, which now seemed never to leave him. Without even bidding me good-morning, he would seat himself at the table and fall to eating. But after the first mouthfuls he would raise his head, and look at me, and I could at once see the look of distrust and uneasiness dawn in the depths of his eyes. I hesitated . . . I asked myself at great length what I could say to him . . . and I always ended by asking a few questions that were always the same and always evoked the same answers:

“Have you been for a walk?”

“Yes.”

“Where did you go?”

“Straight ahead.”

“Down by the Rhone?”

“I am sure I don’t know.”

And silence fell again, such a heavy silence that I made no further effort to break it.

The first time he ever showed any sign of interest was when I received a letter from Guicharde. This was four days after our arrival.

The moment he entered the room and saw the simple blue envelope lying on the Arlesian commode, Fabien recognised the writing and made a brusque gesture. And right away he asked, with feverish impatience:

"Well, well! What does she say?"

She said very little, since she hardly ever went out, and saw nobody. She hoped that Fabien was feeling better, and that this necessary rest, after so much fatigue and emotion, and doing him good. She said that without us the house seemed very big and empty, but that she and Adélaïde were kept busy putting everything in order, so that we should be pleased when we came home. And she concluded with some little phrases in which she put all the tenderness and devotion of her heart.

"Is that all?" interrupted Fabien, as I read these phrases.

"That is all."

"Good," said he, "it's all right."

This was the only time that he questioned me regarding Guicharde's letters. After this, if he found one in the box and brought it up to me, he would throw it down on the table, sometimes with indifference and sometimes with an equally disdainful anger, but without ever again asking what my sister might have to tell me.

He would start out again as soon as the meal was over. And once more I would be left alone.

Then, after putting the room in order, I would go and sit down beside the window. A sense of anguish, each day keener and more painful, invaded and absorbed me, and when I came to myself at the end of an hour or more I realised that during all that time I had been mentally roaming the suburbs and the fields in the wake of Fabien, or beside him, sharing his great remorse and wretchedness. And I felt that the weight of all his weariness was crushing me.

CHAPTER XV

EIGHT days passed in this way, and each day aggravated Fabien's distress and seamed his features deeper. One morning, on his return, he refused to sit down at table, and instead went and threw himself on his bed.

"I am used up," he said. "I am going to be ill."

This was the first time that he had broken down like this in my presence. I saw clearly, however, that he would not yet allow me to ask him any questions. But since he sighed, I sighed with him.

"You are bored. This having nothing to do is a terrible thing."

Already on his guard, already hostile, he almost screamed at me:

"What would you have me do?"

"You might read."

"What should I read, pray? Where am I to find books?"

"At the book shop . . . Romanille has a number of good things."

"How silly you are! Here I am, earning nothing, and you advise me to spend money buying books!"

I had made this suggestion before, and each time I had received the same response. I saw clearly that he was moodily determined to do nothing, and would seek no help, aside from his melancholy walks. And during these lonely afternoons when there was nothing for me to do but to search and follow him in thought, a new soul must have been forming within me; and I had acquired a great patience which refused to be rebuffed by his moodiness. So, after bringing the wine and some fresh water from the kitchen, I made a further suggestion:

"Sometimes, to-day, for instance, would you like me to go out with you?"

"If you would care to."

He decided, after all, to rise and take his place at table when the meal was served. He added:

"And if you have the time."

"I will make time."

"But don't think," he said, opening an egg, "that I am going to wait around until you have put everything in order."

"I will meet you then."

"Where?"

"Wherever you like."

"All right!" he said in a resigned tone, "at four o'clock, at the little café near the Porte de l'Oulle."

I was punctual. And while I made my way towards this dismal rendezvous, thinking of Fabien as I was ceaselessly doing now, and of all this horror of himself that seemed each day to weigh upon him more heavily, I was also thinking that it would be a great act of charity to smile and to look happy when I met him. But in spite of the look I meant it to wear, my face instead must have shown only that my whole heart was aching.

The little café where he was waiting for me, was a cramped and miserable place, with its sidewalk space enclosed by a few sickly evergreens, and a soiled awning, and occupied by cart drivers from Villeneuve, and by a few soldiers. Some coarse women and bare-headed girls were drinking with them. And there sat Fabien in the midst of that rabble, with three saucers in front of him on the little green table, and one glass still full. He emptied it at one gulp when he saw me, and at once joined me outside.

—“But,” I reminded him, “you’ve not paid.”

I stood still, but he drew me on.

“Don’t worry. They know me. I paid my bill last Saturday, and I shall pay again at the end of the week.”

He walked a little heavily, and took my arm to lean upon.

“You have formed the habit of coming here . . . to this place?”

"Why, yes," he admitted, "when I am tired of walking."

Then, instantly on the defensive, he added:

"Is there anything else for me to do?"

After passing the *Porte de l'Oulle* we continued along the ramparts. The summer dust still lay thick upon it, and the first heavy rain, instead of carrying it off, had merely thinned it out in some places and caked it more thickly in others. The stone-work was white with it, and the trees were white, and at their foot the wretched grass struggled for existence between mud and blazing sun. Fabien had let go of my arm. Walking on in silence and with bowed head, he gave his whole attention to breaking up the hard little clods of earth with the tip of his cane, and if he missed one he would lose his patience and angrily grind it under his heel. Evidently this was the way he passed the time when he took his walks alone. I could easily reconstruct the picture. But I had not known where his fatigue would lead him next; I had not known about this café and other similar brain-drugging haunts, in the lowest of low company, in front of the refilled glass and the piled-up saucers. Now that I had a better understanding of many things, not only of to-day but, as it seemed to me, for some time back, I began to realise that I had done nothing at all in merely leaving home with him, nothing at all in consenting to remain

with him here. ¹⁷And I felt that I was now personally responsible for the new degradation towards which he was letting himself drift.

Yet what could I do to help him, so long as he insisted on keeping his great trouble to himself and would not allow me to come near it? What word could I utter touching the heart of the mystery that would not seem to him insulting and fraught with terrible suspicion? With his eyes still bent upon the ground, he was now halting at every step to uproot the short grass with the tip of his shoe. Never had his silence weighed so heavily upon me, and for the first time, instead of enduring it with him, I sought to drag him out of it.

So I touched him gently on the arm, and said :
“ Look at those gipsies.”

At the foot of the rampart a wretched gipsy van had halted, made of miserable paintless boards, and mounted on two wheels. Hitched by a rope to the nearest tree a lean horse as grey as the masonry and as bloodless, was sniffing the arid ground resignedly. And two women busied themselves around a brushwood fire, dipping cloths into a little cauldron, in which some strange mixture, aromatic and pungent, was brewing. The older woman had her hair bound up in a red and yellow handkerchief; the other, still quite young, but shapeless from approaching maternity, wore a

dress of pink flowered calico, with two flounces that trailed in the dust.

She wrung out one of the cloths between her small soiled hands, and dragging herself laboriously, she crossed over to a man who was lying down a few paces away, with his back propped up against a tree trunk, and his left knee done up in blackened and blood-stained rags. His face was distorted by severe pain. The young woman knelt down beside him and began to undo the clumsy bandage.

Fabien, after giving them one glance, promptly turned his head aside, but I wanted him to interest himself in them, so I asked:

"What can be the matter with the poor man?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"But she will infect the wound with that sort of treatment."

"That is their lookout."

I had stopped, but he walked on all the faster. I had to run to overtake him, and quite excited with what seemed to me a sudden happy thought, I exclaimed:

"Fabien! Why don't you examine that poor man? Why don't you tell him what to do?"

Without answering he kept straight on in his rapid stride. I insisted more urgently, and it seemed to me that I was urging him for his own sake, and not for that of the stranger.

"He is suffering. If you would only take pity on him and try to relieve him! Those poor people would listen to you, I am sure they would. And since you have nothing else to do, you could come back to-morrow to see if the man is doing better."

But when I seized his arm, intent on stopping him and making him turn back toward the unfortunate couple, he brusquely shook himself free. And with a sneer and a shrug of his shoulders, he retorted with an ugly twist of his mouth:

"So, I am no longer fit for anything but to tend gipsies by the roadside and dogs dying in the ditches! No other class of patients would put their trust in me now! That is the idea, isn't it? That is what you want me to understand? I am much obliged to you!"

"But, Fabien . . ."

"Leave me alone."

We continued on our gloomy walk in silence. We were now approaching the Saint-Bénézet Bridge, the old bridge of the song. Three of its arches were swept away by the Rhone a long time ago. Broken off thus at the point where the current is most violent, it continues to reach out in vain towards the other bank. But at its middle point it sustains a little chapel; and since we had come to a standstill, tired and uncertain, and equally reluctant to proceed on our way or to re-

turn home, I suggested to Fabien that we should visit the chapel.

"Just as you like," he answered indifferently.

So we went in to find the custodian. The room he lived in was built into the rampart itself, and smelled of onions, old leather and the smoke from a wood fire; and the old fellow, installed in front of a work-bench, was busy repairing old shoes. He was hammering with light blows, with an even, nonchalant movement, and careful to give himself no extra trouble, he neither rose nor interrupted his work, as he pointed to a key hanging on the wall, and then to a little door at the back of the room.

"You have to go up the stairs. They are steep. Be careful not to fall when you come down. And when you are up yonder, don't go further than the guard-rail, just beyond the chapel. There are some who do. But there is no sense in it, because there is no telling whether it is strong enough."

The stairway, crowded in between two walls, velvety with a mossy growth with tiny blossoms, was indeed steep. But there were only a few steps, and at the top the old bridge stretched out, in the full light of the declining sun. There were no other visitors that day; we were quite alone. On the broad flaggings where, according to the legend, the fair ladies used to dance with the fine gentlemen, Fabien dragged his steps more heavily

than ever. He leaned his elbows on the iron railing, and I leaned beside him. The Rhone rolled on ablaze with the flaming sunset. Villeneuve on our left, shimmering in golden light, waited in splendour to be engulfed by the crafty shadows lying in wait in the depths of the deep-cut valleys. In the far distance, Châteauneuf-des-Papes, in the midst of its sombre verdure, spread out its red-roofed houses, like a scattered handful of shelled corn. And from the pale and rocky summit of the hills, from the glowing peak of Mount Ventoux a flood of light seemed to emanate that melted into the sky and fell back again upon the little scattered villages, the ripening fields, the golden earth.

It seemed as though my heart absorbed that light, as everything else absorbed it, and that like everything else, my heart was refined and purified by it. My good intentions became all at once better and more earnest. I once again experienced the same emotion that I felt when I found Fabien in the cabaret. And what I had realised at that moment, I now realised again and more clearly: that it was my duty to advise him and draw him out of himself; but I also knew that the task would be difficult and that I must not let myself be too easily discouraged. The sufferings of other people had failed to touch him; I now determined to try the effect of the beauty of nature, and pointing out the wonderful landscape, I murmured:

“ Isn’t it beautiful? ”

But he shrugged his shoulders with a bored air, and turning away went and sat down on one of the benches built into the wall of the chapel. I did not follow him at once. I remained looking at the sky and the water, and presently, lifted up and out of myself, I felt as though I had become a convert and that I was saying a prayer. It was the most beautiful of all prayers; it shaped itself in my heart and I did not know the words; but I felt the whole strength that came to me from it. What could I say to Fabien, that might help him ever so little? What could I say? Just then some rough and furrowed leaves rubbed against my clasped hands, and I saw that a fig tree had grown up between the stones. Leaning against the buttress of the third arch, which protected it a little from the wind, it had put forth a few stout branches, and strong and vigorous and of a beautiful bluish grey, unspotted with yellow, it derived its sole nourishment from the scanty particles of earth that the wind had brought and heaped up in a fissure which the ruins had worn between the blocks of stone.

“ It has contented itself with very little,” I thought to myself, without grasping the full import of the thought.

And a few minutes later I repeated:

“ It has contented itself with very little.”

Other minutes passed and presently I went to rejoin Fabien inside the chapel. It is a small, round structure, without a door, and looks down upon the current on its way to join the sea. The columns of the altar are ornamented with a confused leafage, and here and there, in the angles of the vaulting around a pillar, delicate sculptures fade away and merge into the stone. But Fabien was not interested in any sculptured vegetation, celestial or demoniac. With crossed arms, and his head slightly thrown back, he was staring at the wall before him, with an air of marked suffering. When I entered, he did not even stir. So I seated myself quietly at his side. I laid my hand gently on his knee and I said in a low voice :

“ How unhappy you are ! ”

And as I spoke, I prepared myself to meet his anger. But on the contrary, he looked at me almost gratefully, and evidently surprised, not so much, perhaps, at my words as at the tone in which they were spoken ; and he acknowledged, in a voice lower than my own :

“ Yes, indeed I am. ”

At the same time he took my hand, pressed it nervously, and retained it in his own. And that little movement summed up all his wretchedness, just as my one brief phrase had summed up all my pity. Nothing further was said . . . nothing

further. But it seemed to me that the essential words had been spoken.

Presently we rose to return to our lodgings; and this return, through the Porte du Rhone and the old streets in the vicinity of the Seminary, was accomplished in silence; and the evening meal, beside the open window overlooking the sombre garden, was also as silent as on other evenings. Once or twice, however, I discovered in Fabien's eyes, in place of watchful distrust and nervous apprehension, the same surprised look that he had worn in the chapel. And at the same time I felt my own persistent anguish relieved by an indefinable satisfaction, so profound that it bore a close resemblance to joy.

*

* *

He set off the next morning quite as early as his habit was, after having spoken scarcely more than usual. But he was less late in returning, and no sooner had he opened the door, than he said:

“Do you know, they have gone!”

I asked him in great surprise whom he was speaking of. And then he answered, in his surliest tone:

“Who would you suppose? The gipsies, of course.”

And he made his way at once to the arm-chair

into which it was his habit to drop, exhausted, on his return from his daily walks.

I had just poured some water into a little blue earthen jar, to hold two roses that I had gathered in Chayère's garden, into which I sometimes descended. But I left the roses forgotten on the table, and crossed over to Fabien.

"Then you went to see them?"

He made no answer.

"You remembered? And felt sorry for them?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I happened to be going that way."

I realised that he had a sort of shamefaced desire to hide his kindly purpose even from himself. He was once more suffering from nervous irritability, and I understood that this was not the moment for questioning him further. But when he had once more gone out, I continued ceaselessly to think of the little kindly impulse that I believed I had detected in him.

The woman who did our housework had not come that day, so I was obliged to go out and buy our supper. I went by way of the Rue Haute and the Rue Vieux-Sextier. I entered those dark little shops that smell of spices and fresh cut wood and dried codfish. On the narrow sidewalks, or sharp-edged pavements, I passed the daughters of Avignon, whose supple figures, long, narrow eyes

and painted lips offer and demand love from the first passer-by; tradesmen's wives also, stout and important, followed by many children; tourists, strangers, vivacious *Parisiennes*, old English women, drowsy and wrinkled, wearing bright colours and big shoes. But all this animation of the joyous city failed to distract me. A strange sort of self-absorption prevented me from seeing clearly the people and the houses around me; and this absorption continued even after I had returned to my silent lodging. I had to prepare the meat, light the fire, and go down to fetch fresh water from the well in the garden. There I lingered for an instant. The high walls around me reflected the shade and the humidity. Nothing grew there but sombre foliage, a spindling laurel, some ivy and boxwood. But I remembered the fig tree clinging to the stones, beaten by the wind, and drawing its strength and its fine colouring from a handful of earth. I repeated, as I had done the night before: "With so little! . . . It is content with so little!" My thoughts wandered on through strange paths, and although my frail reason could not grasp the import, there were times when a great flame seemed to shoot through me and leave me tingling all over for a few confused and exalted moments.

Usually when Fabien returned, I could do nothing more than resign myself to endure his pres-

ence. To-night I simply waited for him. But at once I saw clearly from his haggard face that he no longer felt even that semblance of relief which yesterday, and again this morning, had somewhat lightened his constant suffering. I tried to talk; he remained silent. I sought to take his hand. He snatched it impatiently away. My good intentions, however, refused to be discouraged.

CHAPTER XVI

LAGARDE now lay a long way behind me, like the little towns that fade mistily into the blue background of old paintings. The letters from Guicharde, which arrived almost daily, did not seem to me really to come from Lagarde, and all that my sister had to tell me, aside from her own affection, remained alien to me. Out of all my simple past nothing now remained to me alive and vital excepting what I call my best hours, and by that I do not mean my happiest hours, but those hours of meditation, of self-absorption, of self-questioning, in which one suddenly feels the anguish of possessing a soul, and the need that that soul should aspire to something better and finer. I had known many such hours during my repressed childhood and monotonous girlhood. They were at once my solace and my torment; for the limitations of my inner life permitted me only to feel those yearnings without being able to satisfy them. The daily incentive, which was essential to me, and which some people find in religion, I in my simplicity sought only from love. I demanded everything of love; I even expected it to fill my whole life; and when

love disappointed me I felt that my life was over. How did it happen to-day that the longest and saddest hours seemed to me to possess a savour that I had not known before? I no longer saw anybody; I barely had leisure to leave the house. My time was wholly taken up by household drudgery. My hands were being ruined; on my thumb, and in the seams of the knuckles little black lines had formed that nothing would remove. And my hair, which I love because it is so thick and soft, was turning dull and brittle from being put up every day in too much of a hurry. I realised all this; and from the regret caused by these evidences of waning attractions, I extracted a keen and inexplicable pleasure. My whole life seemed to me to be uplifted by some mighty wind. And nevertheless I was doing nothing except live side by side with an unhappy man, and was only now beginning to feel sorry for him.

Day by day I became more keenly aware of the extent of his suffering; and day by day I drew a little closer to his despairing soul. This was especially true when he was away from me, and his brusqueness and bad temper were no longer there to keep us apart. It was at these times that I relived with him that one abominable moment. I, too, was stifled with that same self-abhorrence that suffocated him. I struggled against it, just as he must have done. I realised that this was

evil that bit into the very flesh of one's soul, and could not be torn off.

And then he would come home, with his haggard face, and I would be in despair at my impotence to tell him that I too had suffered with him. And all the time he seemed suspicious even of my slightest words. Not once since the first day of our arrival, when he forbade it, had he allowed any mention between us of Lagarde. He would frown if I so much as uttered the name of any one living there. Alas! What help could I ever give him so long as he exacted and maintained this utter silence? Thus it was that the idea that it was my duty to induce him to trust me with his secret, his remorse, his great wretchedness, took form within me — hesitant at first and afraid — then gradually calmer, — and at last strong and resolute! What would we make of our lives after he had spoken? What would be the fitting expiation? That I did not know, it lay too far off. But very close to me, in the inmost depths of me, and formed of the best and most intense part of me, there was now the incessant desire, the urgent demand that he should confess to me and find some relief in doing so. I could say nothing, I could not show him even by a glance that he ought to speak, and that my whole heart was ready. But I could surround him with a more devoted watchfulness, and I tried to make it welcome to

him. I showed him little special attentions. I talked about trivial matters which did not directly affect him or myself. Instead of permitting the terrible silence in which all our meals had lately been taken, I now talked of whatever I had seen while I was out, of people, of animals, of houses; and although this merely made him shrug his shoulders, I continued to force myself to smile, until once or twice he smiled in return. Furthermore, in order to keep him from ever going back to the cabaret at the Porte de l'Oulle, I formed the habit of taking walks with him almost every afternoon. We used to go long distances into the country, because the bustle and confusion of the public squares, the sight of passers-by at once roused his irritation.

On our way home we made long detours through deserted back streets, in order to avoid the crowded boulevards. He could not bear to have any one look at him. A sort of morbid and hostile suspicion regarding all living beings seemed to possess him. Accordingly, I was quite surprised one morning when he announced that he had encountered his friend, M. Fabr  jol, and had accepted an invitation for us both to take luncheon with him the following Sunday, at his home at Pamp  rigouste.

*

* *

Of these Fabrèjols — for there were two of them, father and son — Fabien formerly loved to talk, with ostentation. Forty years earlier, my mother-in-law, while on her honeymoon, had been received in Avignon by Mme. Fabrèjol, who was then also a bride. The two ladies, I believe, had previously attended the same convent. And the relations between the two families, cordial on the part of the Fabrèjols, eager on the part of the Gourdots, had been kept up in a somewhat vague but persistent manner. Mme. Fabrèjol was now dead. Her husband and son lived in Algeria, where they were developing vast properties. But they had retained the family mansion situated at the very gates of Avignon; they returned to occupy it for a few months every two or three years, and at such times made costly and useless improvements, which gave, as Fabien put it, impressive evidence of their wealth. Now we had learned, only a few days before our sudden departure, that the Fabrèjols had not yet left France this season; but, as I have already said, Fabien wished for the time being to forget all his friends; and the name of Fabrèjol had been avoided in our little lodgings in the Rue des Trois-Faucons, as completely as every other name.

No doubt, to-day, troubled by the encounter, awkward in his hesitation and fearing that a refusal would appear singular, he had not dared to

avoid the invitation. He suffered from it . . . and I pitied him. Yet I perceived that he was not displeased, but on the contrary quite animated. He talked that day more than usual, and solely of M. Fabr  jol, of his lands, of his wealth, of the political ambitions that perhaps he had, and that he would surely realise. Pleased with the small details that he gradually recalled, polite and friendly little speeches, he told me what a very high opinion this fortunate man had always held of him, Fabien, and his talents. He could not congratulate himself too highly for having such an acquaintance. . . . He was overjoyed at seeing him again. He was so like the Fabien of the old Lagarde days in his small-mindedness that I almost preferred the recent painful and profound silences, and sadly wondered how it was possible for his petty vexations of mind to make him forget so completely his one great tragedy.

Wholly preoccupied with him alone, I gave at first slight attention to a memory which all this talk had brought to life again, and which I must admit, was not displeasing. Three years ago the Fabr  jols had paid us a visit at Lagarde. They had come to choose the marble from the Saint-Jacques quarries for a little pavilion which was to be erected in their garden, modelled after the one in which Queen Jeanne held her court of love in the city of Baux. It is still to be seen, so I am

told, at the foot of the hill, in an enclosure where clover and wheat grow to-day. I had never heard of this queen and her pavilion. It was Philippe Fabréjol who made me acquainted with them.

He had arrived too late to keep an appointment which, after their business was finished, his father had made at our house, and although he found me alone, he remained quite a long time. We had never met before; nevertheless, we at once found ourselves talking like old friends. I remembered distinctly this tall young fellow, with fine regular features, and clear blue eyes set in a sun-burnt face. He talked with agreeable simplicity, but his manner of listening appealed to me more than his words. In his company the words came to me without restraint, all sorts of little ideas danced through my clearer brain, joyous and eager to make themselves known. And I believe that after he was gone, I must sometimes have thought of him. But Mamma considered it quite improper that, finding me without my husband, the young man should have extended his visit so long. She told me so, with as much show of severity as she was ever capable of. And covered with confusion I willingly let the memory of Philippe Fabréjol slip from me, as one opens one's fingers and lets go a feather on a windy day.

But in proportion as Sunday approached, these confused memories occupied me more and more,

and I perceived that this luncheon gave me distinct pleasure. It no longer occurred to me to wonder that Fabien had consented to attend it. His animation appeared to me less distasteful; I even think that I shared it in some degree. But suddenly on the eve of the day when we were to put in our appearance at Pampérigouste, he began once more to be absorbed in himself, and ceased to tell me the thoughts that came to him on the subject of the Fabrèjols. That night I became aware, even in my sleep, that he rose and strode up and down the room and opened the window. Finally, the next morning, when I was already dressed and ready to start, Fabien after having reflected for a long interval, all the while opening and folding and rumpling his newspaper, suddenly declared that he would not go to Pampérigouste. And I felt remorseful for having been, during these last few days, less anxiously vigilant and attentive to his trouble.

At once accepting his decision, without seeming to be surprised at it, and without asking him any questions regarding it, I replaced in the wardrobe the hat I had intended to wear. He looked at me in utter astonishment.

"What are you doing " he asked. "You will be late."

"But since we have decided not to go. . . ."

"I," said Fabien, "not you. You, on the con-

trary, must carry my excuses. You can tell them that I am ill."

And then, giving me the explanation which I had not asked, he added:

"That is what I ought to have answered the other day to Fabr  jol when he expressed surprise at seeing me here. But we met and parted so hurriedly. To-day he would have time to question me at greater length."

His voice was almost confidential. He added more indistinctly:

"I could not have borne it."

And it seemed to me that, uttered in that tone, that little phrase was the beginning of an attempt to let me understand the terrible reasons of his distress.

"I understand," I murmured, speaking in as low a tone as his, "I understand."

And I was frightened, when I thought that now perhaps the whole formidable avowal was to be made. I was frightened . . . and yet at the same time I was thinking "at last! at last!" And I well knew that my whole heart was ready. But Fabien did not recognise that at this moment my own distress was reaching out to meet his, and beseeching him to share it with me. He let the minute pass in silence. And he repeated to me presently:

"You are going to be late; hurry up. There

will be nothing strange in your going out there alone, since you will be received by Fabrèjol's sister. She keeps house for them. You can say that to-day I am feeling worse than usual. Present this excuse adroitly and in a plausible manner. The Fabrèjols are people whom it pays to treat just right."

His thin face contracted. . . . His eyes darkened.

"And besides," he added, "there is no use in having them imagine all sorts of things. . . ."

But these words doubtless struck him as imprudent. And as though he wished to keep me from meditating on them, he immediately began to explain minutely what sort of a carriage I must take from the Place de l'Horloge, and what price I must not exceed if I did not wish to be robbed. I saw that the whole burden of his suffering had once more returned upon him, heavier and more crushing than ever. In spite of my preoccupation and my vague neglect during these last few days, since I had now acquired the habit of rarely leaving him alone, I would much have preferred not to leave him to-day, and I worried at the thought of his loneliness. But I dared not let him suspect it.

CHAPTER XVII

THE Fabrèjols' house does not look down upon Avignon, but upon one of those little valleys which cut into the hills to the south of Villeneuve. It is built half-way up a rather steep slope. Its garden reaches down to the bank of a narrow stream and then rises again on the side, and the red earth, planted with fine olive trees, gives sustenance a little higher up to wild holly and boxwood, clear to the grey and odorous zone where nothing lives but the bare rock and thyme and arid lavender.

The road enters this narrow valley by a little bridge which crosses high above the stream. It was at this point that I perceived Philippe Fabrèjol; he was coming to meet the carriage, and I immediately alighted. He smiled his frank kindly smile. His face struck me as being more bronzed than formerly, and his blue eyes were luminous.

"How glad I am to see you again!" he said, taking both my hands.

And at first his gladness, visible and keen, prevented him from observing that I was alone. He became aware of it suddenly, and full of confusion at his oversight, he coloured and became

so embarrassed in his excuses, that we both of us burst out laughing. Hereupon I explained, in accordance with Fabien's instructions, that my husband was ill, not seriously, but sufficiently so to have been unable to accompany me, to his deep regret. And we approached the house along the driveway, where the chestnuts and acacias still retained enough of their foliage to throw a dancing shadow on the ground.

At this moment a brief silence fell between Philippe Fabr  jol and myself, and we both of us must have used it for the same purpose, for at one and the same time he asked me :

"Have you been able to make any of those wonderful journeys of which you dreamed, Madame?"

And I said to him :

"Have they built that Queen's Pavilion just as you had planned it, with its dome-like roof and its little sculptures?"

The memory of that delightful hour which had brought us together that one day assumed singular and vivid precision. Between us we had retained in memory every word that was uttered. He remembered my little dreams, and I had not forgotten his fine projects; and during the time it took us to reach the house we had resumed our conversation at the very point where we had been forced to abandon it three years ago.

I remember the entrance to that great house, with wide-open windows; I remember how the many trees, crowded around it and laden with their resplendent autumn gold seemed to permeate it with their radiance. The drawing-room with its Provençal furnishings and its high walls draped with bluish green hangings, was filled with smiling faces. There were M. Fabrèjol and his sister Philomène, both equally placid beneath their thick crowns of snow white hair; there were their friends, the Meynadiers, an old married couple, whose forty years of union had in no wise abated their obvious affection; and even Mme. Fabrèjol herself was represented by a portrait taken at the age of thirty, and continued to look down, vivacious and charming, upon the flowers that were daily renewed before the picture. They one and all gave me the kind of welcome that makes one's heart suddenly open to receive it. A deep and quiet gladness such as I had never known, permeated the room and straightway enveloped me too. It penetrated me still more deeply during the gay repast in that bright dining-room fragrant with the last of the summer's roses. And its effect was like that of a smooth and treacherous wine which overcomes the senses before one has even thought of mistrusting it. M. Fabrèjol talked of his beautiful domains in dazzling Algeria, and invited us all to come and visit them.

The Meynadiers chatted of the changes made on their own small estate, their last visit to Paris, their projects for the winter, but they could not utter a word which did not reveal their deep and long-established happiness. Philippe, seated next to me, kept saying from time to time, "Do you remember . . ." as though many days and months — instead of only a single hour — made up our memories in common. And all the ache in my heart had gone, I knew not where.

The ache withdrew still more remotely, when Philippe Fabr  jol, a little later, leaving his aunt and their guests resting in the parlour, took me down to see the Queen's Pavilion at the further end of the valley. M. Fabr  jol started to go with us, but one of his farm-hands came to speak to him. We waited for him a few minutes, and then Philippe decided that his father would join us down there later, so we two went on by ourselves through the green-and-russet garden, redolent at one and the same time of dying summer and delicious autumn.

The path led down between privet and box-wood. From the three large reservoirs that served to irrigate the orchard, the water escaped with a low murmur to join the stream far below. Philippe Fabr  jol explained that his father had had these reservoirs made after the model of the ones that gave their lands in Algeria their abun-

dance and fertility. He described the fields, the vineyards and gardens, and told me of their free life in that far land, their journeys on horseback, the luminous nights in front of the white house, the sea that can be glimpsed in the far distance, small as a precious stone, a limpid enamel, a triangle of silvery blue or greenish gold, sparkling between two hills. We had left the path, and on the humid slope where we were walking, the thick grass, fine and very green, was soft beneath our footsteps.

It continued, unbroken, down to the end of the valley; and the Queen's Pavilion stood in the midst of this lovely carpet. I do not think that I shall ever see anything more charming than that little temple, with its round cupola lightly borne by six fluted columns, adorned with sculptured foliage. Rose bushes laden with their autumn blooming extended their branches between the columns, and their full-blown petals left saffron and crimson stains on the polished marble of the narrow bench, that formed a curve inside the temple.

Philippe made me sit down, after he had completely explained the exterior of the airy structure, in childish and profound delight. Then letting a sudden graver and more attentive sympathy appear in his blue eyes, he said:

"Now, let us talk a little about yourself, if you don't mind."

But whatever pleasure his interest gave me, it meant far more to me for the moment to forget the existence of the unhappy being about whom he was on the point of inquiring, and I refused to be reminded of him.

"No, no," I said almost too quickly, shaking my head, "I would rather not."

"Why not?"

I did not answer. And that, perhaps, was the most dangerous sort of confidence. Philippe Fabr  jol dared not continue to look at me too steadily. But after a long thoughtful minute, he murmured:

"You cannot be very happy."

Fran  ois Landargues had once told me the same thing. Alas! must I always henceforth be obliged to recall Fran  ois Landargues, in order to compare him with other men, and hate him more than ever? And quite desperate at finding myself thus dragged back against my will to things that I would not recall, I stammered:

"I don't know . . . I don't know . . . Let us not talk of that."

He repeated, thoughtfully:

"And why not?"

Then, all at once, embarrassed at his own insistence, he continued:

"Forgive me. We have met only once before

to-day. We do not know each other. Nevertheless . . . there is something that I must tell you, and it will serve as my excuse: often over yonder, on those beautiful evenings of which I have told you, at the hour of rest on our terrace from which we get the view of the sea, it seemed to me that I was back in France, in a town, a very little town, with cramped, sullen, boresome little streets. . . . I entered a parlour, rather sombre and rather sad . . . and there I saw again a woman . . . a young woman. . . . That has happened to me often, yes, very often. It is singular, isn't it? — what memory will do! And we had seen each other so short a time! And we spoke of nothing but the simplest things. But that is the reason, don't you see, why I have allowed myself to ask you. . . ."

He did not repeat his question, but after a silence he asked another instead:

"We shall soon be leaving. Will you permit me to call and bid you good-bye? My father has told me, I think, that you are staying in the Rue des Trois-Faucons."

Once again, because I was in such a wretched state that I could bear no mention of anything that would recall my secret fears, I was on the point of answering, "No, you mustn't!" — for I pictured Fabien and his unmannerliness, and all

the times that he too would be hurt by some trivial word. But just then the loud, cheery voice of M. Fabr  jol called out close beside us :

“ So, you have installed yourselves in the Pavilion? Will you, Madame, deign to hold a Court of Love for the roses and the pomegranates? ”

We returned with him towards the house. And a little later, since night comes early in autumn, we had to separate. The Meynadiers, whose home was close by, left on foot, walking a little heavily and a little slowly, but arm in arm and leaning close together. My coachman was summoned from the servants' hall and my horse from the stable; and the creaking equipage bore me off along the country roads. They were still light but soon began to darken. And the great peace which abided with me, and in which I was still trying to forget everything, was slowly dispersed, in proportion to the distance that I had come from that happy household. I struggled in vain to retain it. When on glancing back I could no longer distinguish the deeper shadow of the valley between the twilit hills, I closed my eyes . . . and I made no attempt to keep my thought from reverting to the Pavilion of the Queen. I was still there when the pavements of Avignon began to shake me roughly; and I still persisted in my obstinate refusal to be stirred from my dream, when after leaving the carriage at the public

square, I returned on foot, slowly and absent-mindedly, to the Rue des Trois-Faucons. It is little frequented and badly lighted. The house struck me as gloomy and the stairway as positively forbidding. "Probably," I told myself, "Fabien has not come in yet." But right away I made out his motionless silhouette in the frame of the open window.

"Well?" he asked in a mournful tone.

I replied with another question, before answering his:

"Have you been out to-day?"

"No."

"What have you been doing?"

"Nothing."

All day long, in that chamber, an agonising soul had groaned and suffered alone, face to face with the most abominable of memories, and had risen up and struggled, and had grappled with his misery to try and strangle it, but had succeeded only in driving it deeper in. And in order to know this there was no need of obtaining his confidence. Just as one could feel the happiness at the moment of entering the Fabrèjol parlour, here one breathed in the odour of anguish. It reached me and penetrated me; it made my head swim like a bad wine from which you avert your face and which nevertheless overcomes you with its unwholesome fumes. How Fabien must have suf-

ferred to-day, and how far away from him I had been all that time! Ah! I had been farther away, hadn't I, than the Fabrèjol house? Farther away than the Kingdom of Baux, about which I had enjoyed hearing, further away than even the land of Algeria, much, much further! And all the while I was lighting the lamp, setting the table, trying to give that dismal room a spark of life, I felt the need of crying out, "Forgive me!"

CHAPTER XVIII

I COULD never forget the sadness of my return home after that happy day. Once again, remorse at my negligence aroused me and did me good. It awoke in me the powers of service. It sustained me on that difficult path which I was anxious to follow, but on which I too often faltered. And I applied myself with all the more diligence, so that I should deserve to have him some day make me the terrible avowal which alone could be the beginning of salvation.

The feverish animation which the meeting with M. Fabréjol had aroused in Fabien, left him as it subsided, more prostrated than before. He asked me only a few vague questions regarding my day at Pampérigouste, and, throughout the whole of that long Sunday, when he had had nothing to think of but himself, his interest in the end had centred on nothing at all. But he seemed to find in my company the only slight contentment of which he was now capable.

Our walks together had become a habit with him. He grew impatient if I could not accompany him; when I talked with him at some length, he let me finish what I had to say, without interrupt-

ing and without shrugging his shoulders. Sometimes in the morning he preferred not to go out, and while I helped the servant in putting our two rooms in order, he remained there, doing nothing, and scarcely taking his eyes off of me. Once he said:

“ You are tiring yourself.”

Another day, after going out he came back quite animated and showed me two books, the edges of which were blackened with dust, and the blue covers bleached by the sun.

“ You see,” he said, “ I followed your advice, I found them at Roumanille’s. A little shop-worn, but reduced to half-price. They deal with local antiquities, and chiefly with medals and pottery,— think of that ! ”

And I was quite touched at his having said: “ I followed your advice.”

This advice, given during those first days and very badly received, I had ventured to repeat the previous evening and Fabien had listened without anger. After this he filled in two or three hours of his time every day with reading. He tried hard to interest himself; he even took a few notes, and made the first draft of that long delayed article that was to be published at Privas. To be sure, it often ended by his flinging aside the book, irritably dashing his pen down upon the paper, and sitting with his elbows on the table, refusing to go

on with his work. But these efforts or rather this beginning of effort, rejoiced me in exactly the same way as the good intention he had shown, the day he came back from visiting the injured gipsy. And the quality of that joy was such that my whole heart felt the richer for it.

I no longer felt in Fabien's presence the sort of constraint which at first had kept me from knowing what it would be wise or unwise to say before him. Words came to me freely now; and his replies had lost that curt and weary tone that had formerly cut short all attempts at conversation. I still avoided any mention of Lagarde or of our past life or of Fabien himself. I knew that he would not yet permit it. In spite of my ignorance, I tried to find some little ideas outside of ourselves and above us. He resigned himself to considering them with me, he even discussed them sometimes. But nothing helped him so much as my presence. And nothing did me more good than this humble need that he had of me. And living entirely by ourselves with our great secret trouble, in noisy, brilliant Avignon, whose gaiety had rung its chimes down the centuries, throughout Provence, we were in some unconscious and profound fashion day by day drawn nearer to each other.

Nevertheless, I had not forgotten the home of the Fabr jols, and in spite of my great remorse on

the night of my return, I found myself back there again and again in thought. My task would suddenly appear useless and too difficult, my shoulders would bend beneath the heavy burden, and my hands relax their hold. I would find myself slipping on the soft turf of a valley where all the roses of springtime had scattered their fragrance, and I would keep my lids for a long time tight shut over my eyes which had peered too far into the depths of another pair of eyes that were blue. Those eyes were very near to me, and I could smell those roses on a certain day when I happened to be alone in the Rue des Trois-Faucons, and heard the old door vibrate from the strokes of the knocker of interlaced serpents. It was not Fabien, neither was it Chayère who knocked like that. They both had their own key, and it never occurred to me for an instant that either of them might have forgotten it. I rose and ran to my mirror. I was all indecision and did not know what to do next. And presently I descended the stairs slowly, and had not need of opening the door to learn who was outside.

"Good morning," said Philippe Fabréjol, in his pleasant, cordial voice.

"Good morning," I answered.

I did not immediately ask him to come in. I had felt quite sure that it was he: I had known that it must be. But now for the first time I was

conscious of a sense of surprise at seeing him. I murmured:

"You have come here?"

"Yes," he replied, "just as I told you I would, to bid you good-bye."

He glanced at my somewhat dishevelled hair, at my short sleeves, at my little scalloped apron of grey checked percale; and his glance was of such a kind that I felt no confusion at all at being so untidy.

"You are leaving France already?"

"Perhaps . . . I am going to explain."

Then he asked:

"Is your husband at home?"

"No."

"I thought he wasn't."

"What made you think that?"

"The excellent Deity who, twice already in my life, has taken his precautions, so that I could talk tranquilly with you."

Without waiting for an invitation from me, he crossed the threshold of the house. The vestibule contained three clocks, two great chests, one on top of the other, and four wooden chair-frames, without paint or upholstery.

"It is quite amusing!" said Philippe Fabr  jol.

"Our rooms are upstairs."

But picturing what a fortuitous lodging was

likely to be, he answered with prompt discretion :

“ You can receive me here, in one of your parlours. There is no lack of furniture ! ”

The windows that morning had been partly opened, thanks to Chayère. A greenish sunlight, which in order to penetrate down here, had to make its way through the dark ivy and sombre laurel of the garden, stretched across the rooms, all of whose doors had been removed, in order to give free passage to the bigger pieces of furniture. In spite of the sunshine, one could smell, just as one does in churches, the odour of wax and of damp tiling. Philippe Fabrèjol followed me into what must have formerly been the dining-room. Surrounding a great altar piece, with tarnished gildings, which faced him at the other end of the room, old mirrors hanging upon the walls and reflecting each other, spotted, dim, narrow and tall or quite small in their dark wooden frames, multiplied in an infinite and confused fashion the singular and helter-skelter disorder of the room, its pallid light and Philippe and myself side by side. We succeeded in seating ourselves in two large arm-chairs that were not too dusty, and that had come from Italy some three hundred years ago; the torn leather was still held in place by large, flat rusty nails. Making merry at first, and insisting upon examining everything, my companion declared that there were several rather fine

pieces there, and that he was going to see this man Chayère at his shop. He asked me for the address, and I gave it to him. And we continued for a while to talk of the furniture and the man. Finally, Philippe found nothing more to say on the subject, and I also became silent. Then, almost at once, I asked him over again:

“Then you are leaving soon?”

He repeated:

“Perhaps.”

And with the same grave look that he wore the other day, when we were sitting in the pavilion, he continued:

“It is not yet quite decided. I think that I made it a pretext for not waiting longer before calling on you. I was afraid that you would be going back to Lagarde and that I should not see you again. You must forgive me.”

“I do forgive you.”

And I began to laugh, wishing to prove to him that I attached very slight importance to the whole matter. But my laugh was so sonorous that it startled me. It was not the laugh of social amenity, but a genuine laugh, a laugh of happiness. And I recognised that my laugh had not been caused by the words, “You must forgive me,” but by that other remark in regard to his prospective departure, “It is not yet quite decided.”

"Thank you!" said Philippe. "Yes, you see, I wanted to come, and so I came."

He was slightly embarrassed, for he did not know how to express his thought, except by being frank.

"The other day," he said at last, after having somewhat sought his words, "was a very happy day for me."

He did not indicate precisely which day he meant, and I felt that I had a right not to understand him fully.

"But you must often have happy days. You have enough to make them so."

"No doubt," he conceded.

Then, with that seriousness which he could assume when he was thinking deeply, he added:

"Nevertheless. . . ."

All at once, the same thing happened as on that other morning when we were approaching Philippe's home: our embarrassment vanished. I ceased to be constrained, and he to hesitate . . . and in the second which intervened before he completed his phrase, we had both become our natural selves.

"What would you think of any one who could be altogether happy, simply because he is in good health and is earning plenty of money?"

"You are not happy merely for those reasons. Your life is useful to a large number of persons

whom you employ, and to France which you are enriching. And besides, that land of which you told me, those mornings in the mountains, those long excursions, those luminous evenings. . . . Living in a beautiful land, and enjoying it as you do in all its beauty, is a reason for happiness which seems to me very far from despicable."

"It is one of the best of reasons, but something more is essential."

"Whatever this something more may be, you must possess it, along with the rest."

I understood quite well that he had reference to love, but while I was picturing, with a touch of sadness, some very beautiful woman, who loved him passionately, he answered:

"I thought that I had it, but it is the most difficult thing of all to obtain, and I was mistaken."

He pronounced these last words very simply, very sincerely also, and I realised that, whatever they meant, he would not have uttered them to the world at large. He continued:

"One is often mistaken. . . . I even thought . . . I believed that I had the right to think . . . that one is always mistaken. But I also believe now that I no longer have that right. In my judgment of some one whom, nevertheless, I have known very briefly, I believe that I am not mistaken. You are looking at me . . . you have

understood. For that matter, I am not trying to speak to you by innuendo. If I did, I should be even more awkward than I am when I speak frankly, and that is saying a great deal. Madame, do not make that little gesture . . . do not assume that expression. We have been friends for three years, and the other day I suddenly became aware of it. Ever since that day. . . ."

I rose. And acting just as though nothing else had been said since we were talking of the old house, of Chayère and his furniture, I suggested:

"Come, I want to show you the garden."

"If you like," agreed Philippe Fabrèjol.

And he was not in the least annoyed at having been interrupted, because he knew quite well that, in spite of everything, he was still going to say what he had intended to say. Descending with me the wide, low steps he admired the wrought-iron flowers interlaced in the rusty railing. He looked at the fountain and the grotesque figure spouting its limpid water, and the other grotesque figures hanging uselessly all the way around the damp wall awaiting a purchaser, with their gaping mouths containing nothing but the webs spun by spiders. Presently he resumed with calm decision:

"Ever since the other day I have literally not ceased to think of you. And I ask myself how that has happened, for I do not believe that my

feeling has yet become love. Nevertheless, in speaking with my father of our approaching departure and the long time we expect to be away, I found myself suddenly and deeply sad. I sought the reason and I realised that I should regret not seeing you again; I may even say, I should suffer. . . . Why? . . . I have no idea. I am not trying to talk to you of your eyes or of your charm or of your beautiful soul that one feels is pulsating in every little word that you utter. I don't want to pay you compliments. I say to you simply: This is how things are. And I have come to ask you. . . ."

I knew that his eyes were fixed on me, I could feel them. But I kept my head bowed, and without the strength to interrupt him, I stared fixedly at the little irregular boxwood that formed a border around the damp garden plot.

"I have come to ask you: must I go right away . . . at the end of this month? That is all. . . . I ask nothing more than this little indication of what line of conduct I should follow. Personally, I am able to delay my departure. My father could precede me over yonder by six or eight weeks. During that time, if you remain here, we could meet each other occasionally . . . and if you return to Lagarde, I could often be called there on business. In that way I believe that we could really become friends. Later on, when I

finally go, we should have our letters, which are a great source of happiness . . . and then . . . there is no telling . . . I shall come back, and certainly without letting three years pass this time . . . there is no telling . . . it is not wise to look too far ahead. . . . It is to-day that hurts or gives us joy . . . and it is to-day that I am asking you: at what date must I leave France? That is all, I am asking nothing more."

He did not try to touch my arm or my hand. He spoke slowly. But as he had come to a standstill directly in front of me, I found myself obliged to raise my head; and letting my eyes for a second meet those clear blue eyes of his, I once more felt such a wave of gladness sweep through me that I was terrified.

"You must leave . . . you must leave immediately."

"Oh, no!" said Philippe Fabr  jol, smiling. "That is not the way you must answer me. This is very serious, since you have the power to hurt me very deeply. You must take time to decide. You must think it over for a week and then you shall give me your answer."

"It will be the same answer as to-day."

"I am not at all sure of that," he declared, "and neither are you."

The walls seemed to have grown higher, the ivy more dense. We were slowly spinning around in

a green prison. When we once more found ourselves before the wide stairway Philippe Fabr  jol extended his hand.

“Good-bye till our next meeting. In eight days at the same hour, if that suits you, I will meet you in the Calvet Museum. The rooms are quite deserted. No one goes there but a few strangers, and anyway you have nothing to tell me except a mere date!”

He clasped my fingers firmly and frankly, and without a suggestion of a furtive squeeze. Along the marble flagging of the hallway I led him to the street door. Once again, in the depths of the open parlours, the dim mirrors reflected our outlines side by side.

“Good-bye,” he said once more.

And he did not remind me, as he left, of the appointment he had made with me one week hence at the Calvet Museum. He had no desire to make me give him any promise to meet him; he knew quite well that nothing of that sort was necessary.

CHAPTER XIX

THAT evening, when Fabien came in and spoke to me, I had the sensation of not really seeing him there before me, of not seeing the surrounding room, with the orderliness that I had found pleasure in maintaining there. I perceived only, beneath the shade of a plane tree, that danced a little because a slight breeze had risen and was stirring among the leaves, a young girl looking just as I remembered her on a certain June morning, in a checkered dress and a simple round hat. She seemed to be looking at me. She had learned the danger of François Landargues' smile; she had learned the emptiness of Fabien Gourdon's petty soul; and her eyes were sad. But I leaned towards her and I whispered, "Love has come." And I had no room for any other feeling than a great joy, which set the young girl a-trembling.

That is how it was with me, all that evening and the next day and still the next. Taken altogether, that makes only a small number of hours, but small as it was, it held a larger portion of life than the whole remaining sum of my brief years. I tried to analyse this joy which was so unlike all

other joy. I pressed my hands together as though holding it close, and then parted them a little to look at it again. I offered up to it all my great desires and my little hurts, and the more I fed it on my heart's blood, the stronger and more glorious it seemed.

Tired and sick of the daily routine, I could no longer force myself to do anything except lean down over the garden in which Philippe Fabr  jol had talked to me; but although even in my window I was bathed from head to foot with its green and humid shadows, I soon found that the garden demanded a more complete possession; I had to feel beneath my feet the earth where Philippe had trod. So I would go down and gaze at the wrought iron flowers he had liked so much, on the hand-rail of the stairway; and a little further on I would touch the lustrous boxwood on which my eyes had rested while he was saying, "We have been friends for such a long time." He had also said, "And we can meet again occasionally." And he had said further, "There will be our letters . . . and besides I shall be coming back." And following his advice, with no wish to look beyond such joys as these, I closed my eyes on what the future might hold for him and for me.

And then I would come back to the parlour where we first sat down. I would partly open the shutters and let in the same amount of day-

light. I would approach those mirrors whose clouded surface had simultaneously reflected his image and my own, I would draw so close to them that my features became only a confused blur, behind which I imagined that I could see another face. At last I would be obliged to go up again to our little apartment; but how inopportune the presence of Fabien was! I had ceased to talk to him about books; I had ceased to take any interest in the clumsy article which I had urged him into beginning; I would have been thankful to have him go out every morning as he had previously done. I would have been thankful to have him stop asking me, in the afternoons, to accompany him on his walks. Then I could have gone out alone, into the country, along the bank of the restless river, alone! . . . with only the company of that secret presence.

Only a few days . . . it lasted only a few days. Such a very small number of hours! I had lost all memory of my narrow and methodical life. I never stopped to think whether wrong existed. I feared nothing. I expected everything. I became incapable of feeling any distress, any pity, any remorse. Nothing but joy, just joy.

This joy took no definite form. It was a sort of inward thrill, marvellous and confused. I now thought incessantly of Philippe Fabr  jol, and longed for his presence, and yet I had not made

up my mind what answer I should give him when the time came to see him again. It seemed to me, one morning, as though my brain suddenly began to work again. I was thinking: "Only five days more before Tuesday . . . only five days more." And then for the first time a vague anxiety began to mingle with my deep happiness.

It became necessary for me to gather up my courage. I wanted to see the Calvet Museum which I must soon enter to meet a young man whom I knew only slightly, and to tell him, in order to make it clear that I cared for him: "You mustn't start right away . . . we must see each other some more, as you requested." So I went to the Museum the next day while Fabien, who was becoming daily more interested in the research I had suggested, had gone to the library to consult certain authorities. Accordingly, I reached the Museum, passed through the entrance, and told the attendant that I had been there before, and that he could let me go in alone. During those morning hours the galleries were empty, except for the sunshine that lay on the polished floors, and those silent people with pictured faces or sculptured forms. They both intimidated me a little, and I tried at first to admire them, so that they should not be too much surprised by my inattentive presence. So I looked at them a long time, but without quite seeing them, and at last I

went and sat down in the third gallery. There I hardly know what thoughts that I could no longer control, took possession of me. Like the painted forms and the forms of stone which surrounded me, those thoughts were there and I tried to examine them, but could not distinguish one from another. All the time, tired of this confused and apparently useless meditation, I wanted to rise and leave the place, and yet I found it impossible to do anything but stay.

I remained so long that all at once the attendant appeared in the doorway. He had suddenly remembered that I was in the building, and was afraid I had been taken ill. I was greatly embarrassed. I told him that as a matter of fact I was a little over-tired, and with that I hurried out. My head felt heavy with the multitude of thoughts that had passed through it, but I did not know what they were and I was still undecided as to what I must say to Philippe Fabr  jol.

It was late when I got home. However, Fabien was not yet there; but I had forgotten him, his absence at that hour did not surprise me; and I went at once to lean out of the window and have another look at the garden. But I started violently when I saw that my husband was down there, slowly pacing back and forth. Never before to my knowledge had he been down there. And my surprise was straightway mingled with ir-

ritation. He was studying the flowers in the iron railing which Philippe had liked so much. He watched the water spouting from the grotesque stone image, and absent-mindedly touched the lustrous leaves of the low boxwoods; and it seemed to me that each of his glances, each of his gestures brushed away some of the happy shadows. I wanted to cry out to him: "Away with you! You have no right to be in that garden, you have no right at all." But just then he raised his head and perceived me, and uttering an almost joyous exclamation, he dashed back into the house.

I heard his precipitate footfalls on the stairs. And all at once I recalled that other night when I heard him coming up like this, the night that he had been summoned to the bedside of François Landargues. Had I forgotten that night? It suddenly seemed to me as though I had only just recalled the memory of it . . . and also the memory of the morning that had followed, and of the first evening when I saw Fabien again, haggard and dripping from his dash through the storm. And I think that just at first, for one moment after he entered, I faced him with the same look, a look of horrified questioning, that dared not shape itself in words.

"Oh!" said he, "There you are! I was growing anxious."

"Why should you? What could happen to me?"

"I don't know . . . You see, it's like this"—and although he was still near the door, at the other end of the room, I had the physical sensation of feeling the whole burden of his pain weighing and quivering on my shoulder—"You see, I find now that I can't get along without you."

*

* *

To think of his having spoken to me like that! And I had felt his great distress seeking to take refuge in me. And I had seen a beseeching tenderness come into his eyes that had never revealed itself before. But the better part of my soul, the part that might have been stirred by all this, continued to absent itself; and all the feelings that had come to birth in the course of the last few weeks, amounted to nothing at all beside those which had been born during the last few days.

At least I thought, I honestly thought, that all this was so. But why had all my happy shadows literally vanished from the garden? When I went down there a little later, as I did every day, to look for them, I could not find them there, and I felt now that in place of them the garden was haunted by the heavy shadows that clung about Fabien, and that I must help him bear.

Our walk that day took us beyond the Rhone, as far as Villeneuve, a depressing, dead-alive place, with abandoned palaces and deserted streets in which the grass was growing. On the way back, finding ourselves tired, we sat down for a moment by the wayside. Evening was drawing near and it was almost cold. All around us throughout the countryside, and ahead of us in Avignon the lamps were being lit inside the houses.

Wrapped in my cloak, and sitting close to Fabien, who pressed himself against me, I thought of our own home back in Lagarde, lying a little further to the north, behind the hills that were already outlined darkly against the grey sky. By this time Adélaïde too must have lit the lamp, and Guicharde had seated herself at the table to write me once more, "When are you coming back?" That was the question which, for the past week she asked in all her letters. She was finding the time long, she was lonely, and somewhat astonished. "Fabien," she observed, "must by this time have had all the rest he needed." Thinking of her, I thought also of the home of which she remained guardian. Would we ever go back to it? Could we ever go back and start over again to live there as we had formerly lived — after Fabien finally spoke and we could together face the past with its one frightful moment, and the

future with all its days and months and long years?

For the moment while I was questioning myself after this fashion, the past and the future suddenly assumed a very small importance. I barely distinguished the one from the other. I thrust them from me. I returned to Lagarde; and there I found again my obscure little street, my dull, tiresome house, my gloomy bedroom. But Philippe Fabr  jol was walking down the street, on his way to see me; or he was just entering the house; or I had shut myself up in my room to read his letters, or to answer them; and I so loved that street, and that room and that house.

Fabien suddenly touched me gently on the arm. He too was gazing around us at the lamps in the windows, and no doubt they had reminded him, as they had me, of home.

"I didn't tell you — I wrote to Fardier yesterday."

He had not uttered this name since our arrival in Avignon. I trembled and stared at him. But the twilight had already rendered his face indistinct.

"You wrote to Fardier? Why?"

"To ask him to tell me —"

"Tell you what?"

"What is happening back there."

And breaking down at last, he leaned his head on my shoulder.

"Oh! If you only knew! If you only knew!"

We had sat down at the side of the cold and deserted road, like two vagabonds. Our home was far away, and perhaps we would never return to it, and life as a whole was turning dark around us, just like this countryside, where the shutters were beginning to close one after another hiding the glow of the lights within. We were like two paupers at the side of the road, alone, wholly alone, with this one memory, one obsession, one burden.

And now as I felt the dreadful confession approaching me for the second time, I told myself for the second time, "At last, at last!" I waited, trembling a little, and pressing my two hands one against the other, for they had turned cold, and trying already to aid and sustain him, I murmured as sorrowfully and as secretively as he himself:

"I do know . . . I do know. . ."

But just as on the day when he refused to take luncheon with the Fabr  jols, Fabien found it impossible to give me his whole confidence. It was only after a long moment, when he had become a little calmer, that he calculated:

"Fardier will answer by return post. But the

mail is very irregular at present. I don't expect to receive his letter before Tuesday."

He gave a profound sigh, and without adding anything further, without allowing another word to be spoken, he said:

"Let's turn back."

Night had come, and there was no moon. We walked slowly, stumbling over stray pebbles at the edge of deep ruts. It was Fabien who this time took my arm, and at times he steadied himself upon it.

*

* *

What had he written to ask? What was the answer to be?

What did Fabien know? A thousand conjectures crowded in upon me, confused and tragic. I did not know what could have happened at Lagarde in connection with the dead man during our absence. I did not know what Fabien hoped or feared to learn. But on this road, while he held my arm, and we stumbled on in the dark, utterly alone, I all at once had the certainty that after receiving that letter, whatever it might be, Fabien would tell me everything, that he could not help telling me everything. The certainty, and no longer a vague and anxious presentiment, such as I had just now, or just as I had the other morning when his courage failed him and he let me go

alone to Pampérigouste. The certainty! Thursday, it would happen Thursday. And this time the moment had surely come when I must prepare the needful words in my heart. I could already feel them coming from my lips, at once hesitant and tumultuous, so simple and yet almost sacred, because they were destined to decide the future, the whole future, not only for me, but more especially for his poor, crushed spirit, that I should have to lead onward toward redemption, toward peace and life. Already I was striving to choose the best possible words. But when we had passed through the ramparts and entered the town, and its lights and noise and gaiety burst upon us, I remembered that on that very same Thursday I should be called upon to utter other words of a very different import. What were these other words to be? What were they to be? Little by little, I asked myself this question with growing eagerness. And then it dawned upon me that in regard to these other words, there was no further room for choice or hesitation. The sort of halo with which my many pious thoughts and my many efforts to uplift and sustain myself had surrounded my burden had little by little died away. I saw my burden now in its cold and naked simplicity, like the red orb of the winter sun, from which nothing seems to descend upon suffering humanity but a sharper and more biting cold. Now

that I had the certainty of receiving that confession, the prospect served only to terrify me; I had forgotten for what purpose I had meant to use it; but I remembered only too well what joy had already come to me, and what happiness was still in store, from Philippe Fabr  jol.

Then ought I to hesitate? Was it still possible to hesitate? Why? In the name of what? The essential words to be spoken now were not for Fabien's ears; they were those I must speak to Philippe. It was only for those that I needed to rally my wavering courage. Four days only separated me from Thursday. Here was my task for those four days.

Yes, for four days I truly thought of nothing but Philippe Fabr  jol — through all those hours tirelessly, so deeply absorbed in my dreams that I did not feel those rapid hours pass one after another. I went, just as on that other day, down the Rue Joseph-Vernet, where here and there a bit of green spreads its plumes between the sculptured stones of the old dwellings; I passed through the iron gateway; I entered the Museum; and just as the other day, there was the beautiful autumn sunshine lying on the polished floors; but beside the painted faces and the faces of marble, there was also Philippe Fabr  jol. He came to meet me. He asked me nothing but merely looked at me. I said simply: "Don't go." And perhaps he un-

derstood even better than I did myself all that lay behind that little phrase — and perhaps I knew even better than he all that rose at that moment into the depths of his eyes.

Through all those hours . . . tirelessly . . . Fabien had not spoken to me again about Fardier's letter, and I had forgotten that he was expecting it. I returned to my garden, damper every day and more deeply permeated by autumn. In the clear sound of the water, in the aroma of the box, all my dear memories had come back again. I looked at them, I breathed them in, I brought away their fragrance with me on my hands which had all the while been gathering and crushing some of the leaves.

On Wednesday afternoon, yielding myself more completely than ever to its magic charm, I lingered in the garden till twilight. When at last I returned to the house and was passing along the dark hallway toward the stairs, at the front end of the passage I saw the street door open and promptly close again. Fabien had come back from the library. He did not perceive at once, and I could hear him groping in the darkness, searching for something. Almost immediately there was the sputter of a match, and the little round flame lit up his upraised hand.

It also lit up the letter box attached to the wall behind the door. Fabien opened it so impatiently

that the slender key, slipping from the lock, remained between his fingers; he flung it on the floor, plunged his hand into the narrow opening, and I could hear his searching and nervous nails scraping against the tin sides of the box.

"Oh! there you are!" he said, as I reached his side. "I was looking . . . I thought that. . . . But perhaps it won't come until to-morrow. No, not till to-morrow."

For a moment longer the little flame that he held shed its light over both of us. Then it went out. Fabien repeated:

"To-morrow . . . surely."

And I became aware that I was repeating with him, and with an anxiety even more painful than his own:

"To-morrow . . . it will surely come to-morrow."

CHAPTER XX

THE next day was very clear and still mild, and shed its golden light over the roofs and belfries of the city. No sooner was Fabien awake than he asked:

“Has the mail come?”

He had not slept, but had merely dozed off towards dawn. Nevertheless he rose promptly, and as soon as he was dressed, refusing to eat, he began to pace feverishly up and down the rooms. Often he halted, stock-still, in great uncertainty, and stared unseeingly at me or at the opposite wall. At such moments it frightened me to discover in his face the same pallor and perturbation and drawn suffering as on those first days after we came to Avignon. And little by little as I watched him, and as I listened to the unbearable and regular pounding of his footsteps on the sonorous flooring, the nerve-racking strain of the suspense overcame me too. That letter! Would it never come? I had ceased to think of it for the past two days — I believed that I had ceased to think of it — but the conviction which had come to me out yonder on the country road when we were

alone in the dark and the cold, the conviction that after he received that letter he would tell me everything, that he could not keep from telling me everything, came back to me now — and it was so strong and deep that, without my knowing it, throughout those two days it must have been steadily growing within me.

I was not haunted by any curiosity to know what the letter would contain; and I did not keep asking myself, "After he has read it, what is he going to tell me?" but only, "How much longer have I got to wait?" My feverish impatience, like Fabien's, increased with the passing hours. Three times in the course of that morning, he went downstairs to assure himself that the postman had left nothing in the little tin box, and three times I went down in my turn. When either of us came up again, the other would question with just one word:

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

We did not utter the word "letter." And the message that we were both waiting for it to bring, we neither of us wanted to speak of. While we failed to control our movements, every one of which betrayed our impatience, we struggled almost childishly to hide the deep-seated causes of that impatience.

"I am not going out to-day," declared Fabien

at the outset of the afternoon. "I am feeling rather tired."

There would be three more deliveries before night. Guicharde's letters usually arrived by one of them, and I understood quite well why he was not willing to leave the house. Meanwhile my eyes were fixed upon my little clock where it stood at one corner of the big grey marble mantel-piece with sculptured scrolls and flutings, and I followed the movement of the hands, and among those blue enamelled figures I watched especially one hour, out of all the others — the hour already so near, when I must, this very day, meet Philippe Fabr  jol at the Calvet Museum.

"How about you?" continued Fabien, showing once again how essential my presence and my support were to him. "Are you going out? I would rather. . . . That is, I would be glad to have you stay home with me."

I think that he feared that letter, and dreaded being alone when it came. Once again I felt the actual contact of his quivering distress. And I knew that the moment was coming, that the moment had already come, to say to him: "Share your burden with me. I will help you bear it." But there were those figures on the little clock. . . . There was that *one* figure especially. And inside of me, among all my other thoughts, there was that one thought: "I must soon get

ready — I must get ready now — I can't keep him waiting." I rose. But perhaps it was still too soon, and I went and took another chair near the window.

"I can stay with you a quarter of an hour longer," I said to Fabien. "After that I must go out. . . . I absolutely must . . . to buy some things."

He demanded: "What things?"

But I forgot to answer, and he did not question me further; he dared not insist; he dared not show too plainly how afraid he was of being left alone at that moment. Nevertheless he said at the end of five minutes:

"Start at once then. . . . You will get back all the sooner. I would like that better."

I obeyed him. Already I had begun to be purely mechanical; already, no doubt, I realised that in all that was destined to follow, my own little will would play a very insignificant part.

*

* *

The Rue Joseph-Vernet, with its gardens and the old residences, the iron fence, the Museum, the custodian who smiles when he recognises me, and asks me whether I am going to feel ill again, as I did the other day, because I still look pale — all that is real to-day, and then again perhaps I am back in my garden and imagining it all. Here are

the steps that I must go up. Here is the first gallery, which is empty, and the second and the third. Philippe Fabr  jol must have gone clear to the third, so that we should be more secluded. I hesitate a little before entering that third gallery; I look for a long time at a little nun carved in stone — 14th century, says the label — she is kneeling beneath the heavy folds of her veils, and she wears a smile of enigmatic ecstasy on her face, and her eyes are lowered. At last I make up my mind to enter, almost serenely.

Philippe Fabr  jol was not there. But at that moment I heard the clock of St. Agricol strike the three quarters before four o'clock. Fabien had made me start too soon, or else I had walked too fast, and Philippe could not have got there yet. So I was not surprised. . . . I merely recalled that in all the wonderful visions I had conjured up of this moment, it was always he who arrived ahead of me.

So I sat down to wait for him; and it was on that same bench of old polished wood where I had remained so long that other day. The same faces looked down upon me. And I believe that the same thoughts which had formerly bewildered me, little by little began to set my head in a whirl. I continued to see these thoughts only dimly, and to be unaware of their exact nature. But instead of yielding to them passively, I had the impression

that this time I was trying to resist them. With my hands folded upon my knees, I gazed from time to time at the blue robe of a saint, or the obscure trees of a landscape, or simply at the regular pattern of the polished inlaid floor; and I must have presented the appearance of waiting tranquilly and without impatience. And yet, all the while, I had the sensation of resisting, of struggling, of being at last overpowered, and of extracting from my surrender a painful yet magnificent joy.

All this seemed to me to have lasted immeasurably long; and yet the time must really have been quite short, for the clock on St. Agri-col's had not yet struck four o'clock when Philippe Fabr  jol appeared on the threshold of the room. He came towards me at a rapid pace, clasped my hand in his customary firm, frank manner, and without showing surprise at seeing me there, nor thanking me for having come, he seated himself beside me.

An expression of great gladness animated his handsome face, and after the first bare common-places, he seemed for a time to prefer silence. So we sat there, neither speaking nor looking at each other. And during that silence I saw once again, for the last time, the Pavilion of Queen Jeanne, the roses shedding their petals over the white marble bench, the happy household. . . . I saw again the parlour in the Rue des Trois-

Faucons, and the dim mirrors, and the little garden. And I felt within me, once more for the last time, the possibility, the dazzling hope, the ecstasy of such joy.

At last Philippe took my hand. He raised it a little way, pressed it against his breast, and by this little gesture obliged me to turn my face towards him:

"Well?" he questioned.

"Well! . . . I told you the other day, and now I have come to tell you the same thing again."

I felt a brief quiver in the hand that clasped my own.

"Then repeat it, will you?"

I said nothing.

"You told me the other day?"

I said nothing.

"You are afraid to be frank. Why? I must go now, mustn't I?"

"Yes."

He held my hand a second longer, and then gently released it.

"Why?"

"It has got to be so."

"Why?" he insisted. "Why cannot we two be friends . . . and more than friends? Every time that I have seen you it has seemed to me that what I said did not offend you — it has seemed to me that you were very much alone, and that you

suffered from it, and that, in spite of your tranquil manner, you had, not so much the desire as the profound need of love — of a love that —”

He hesitated, but he had no time to find the closing words of his phrase.

“You are mistaken . . . I am not suffering from any such solitude . . . I already have love. . . .”

My muffled voice, low and sincere, sounded suddenly very strange to me, and I was filled with curiosity, astonishment, stupefaction at the words I had uttered.

“Oh!” murmured Philippe Fabr  jol, “Forgive me!”

His lids fluttered somewhat nervously, over the blue eyes, whose brilliance had grown dim, but he did not add a single other word. After one brief moment, he rose and began to examine the paintings which were displayed in that room. He really appeared to be looking at them, for he approached them at first, made out the signature, and then stepped backward a little, in order to judge them better. But he soon rejoined me and, as calm as ever but with his fine eyes a little less animated, although still friendly, he said:

“You see how far preferable frankness is to everything else! I thought that you were free . . . I mean . . . that your heart was free, and

that alone is true freedom — and I really think that I was going to fall in love with you. But you are not a flirt, and I thank you for that. Another woman would have amused herself for some time with my much too simple speeches, and would have rendered me far more unhappy than I am going to be as it is. You are quite right. I shall leave at once. Over yonder I shall find a way of driving off certain foolish dreams, if they persist in haunting me. And on my return, a long time hence, if I see you again, I shall tell you very tranquilly about the thoughts — all the absurd thoughts — I had during the week that I lived in the joy of waiting for your answer — so that you can laugh about it with me.”

I saw quite well that he would have liked to laugh at once, before the time for laughing had come; but I saw also that it was beyond his power to do so. So he left me once more and went to the further end of the room, to take a look at the Gallo-Roman sarcophagus of St. Eutropius, Bishop of Orange. And when he came back, his mind was firmly made up to confine himself to social small-talk.

“I leave Avignon in a week. Probably I shall not have time to return to pay my compliments. You must excuse me.”

“In a week!”

I do not know what tone I gave to those three words. Philippe looked at me. Then I said, speaking very fast:

"That will be the twelfth."

"Yes, the twelfth."

He continued to look at me. He waited. Then, when the silence had reached the extreme limit beyond which it could not be borne, he said, in a rather brief tone, but without rancor or sarcasm:

"Good-bye, Madame."

A long and cordial hand-clasp. A last glance, slowly averted. A salutation. A firm and youthful step departing through the deserted galleries. And the silence and emptiness . . . and the sudden shock of a sort of desperate revolt:

"Why did I do that? Why did I say what I did? Why?"

*

* *

Two English ladies entered the room. They wore thick, figured veils over their startlingly green felt hats, and their big-pocketed jackets were belted in at the waist with leather belts. The custodian accompanied them. They asked him a thousand questions about the Museum, about the old palace in which it was installed, about Dr. Calvet, whose name it bears, and even, so it seemed to me, about St. Eutropius himself.

Scarcely heeding what they said, he answered them by citing other names and describing other people than those in whom they showed interest, reciting mechanically the stereotyped doggerel that he had learned once for all. I watched them, I listened to them, I drew a keen enjoyment from the grotesque incoherence of the interview. But soon the presence of those women, their acid and insistent voices, became unbearable. So I left the Museum, walking rapidly, with a sense of running away and seeking a refuge.

I passed through one street after another, almost at haphazard, turning my back to the Rue des Trois-Faucons, for I could not and would not go back there at this moment, notwithstanding that the letter had perhaps arrived and Fabien was expecting me. It seemed to me that it would be impossible for me to perform any act, pronounce any word, until I had answered that despairing "why" that I had almost sobbed forth just now when Philippe Fabr  jol left me. It seemed to me as though I could not go on living until I understood.

A woman ahead of me ascended the steps of St. Agricol. She was tired, and her features looked drawn; but she gazed eagerly towards the narrow entrance to the church, and her lips were already moving with the prayer she was about to offer. It occurred to me to follow her, and take refuge

with her behind those walls; within their shadow, I might perhaps concentrate my thoughts for needful meditation. But I had never been properly taught how to find help in churches. Any prayer that I might utter would be purely mechanical. So I continued on and on, to the Porte de l'Oulle, and passed the cabaret where I once found Fabien seated at a table; then leaving the city, I reached the bank of the Rhone, where the dusty grass was at last dying and withering under the autumn wind.

Now I walked more slowly. When I had reached the Saint-Bénézet Bridge I sat down beside the river, on a big stone that swayed a little in the sodden earth, and was so close to the water that the peaceful little waves that lapped the shore gently reached up and touched the toe of my shoe.

Why had I repulsed Philippe Fabrèjol? In the name of what? Did he not represent the sum total of the love that I was longing for?

I clasped my two hands above my knees. Raising my head, I saw the old bridge with its broken arches, the round chapel and the highest leaves of the fig tree which had grown between the stones. Bending my head, I saw the water flowing peacefully at my feet, but a little further from the bank, rushing in a furious torrent. And between the stones and the water, I also saw all my little life spread out before me.

Not all my life, perhaps, but all of its hours that had drawn near to love. The most remote, the most exacting hours contained only the fair dreams of a girlhood without gaieties, without pleasures, without girl friends, without studies. The most perturbed hours preserved the memory of François Landargues. The most painful hours were those in which I had realised fully the mediocrity of Fabien Gourdon. The most beautiful hours . . .

Which hours were these? I was still seeking, and perhaps I was approaching the inmost depths of the soul where only too often the best part of ourselves reposes, and suddenly awakes. But I was groping my way, and among all these thoughts which drew me in different directions, I found it as hard to distinguish one from another as when one sees the slender peaks of the trees turning golden with the rising sun, while the great mass remains vaguely hidden by the mist of the fields. I reverted to François, to the little joys and the little hurts that I had received from him, and it all was worth nothing. I reverted to Fabien and my disillusion, and all that was worth nothing. And now it still was none of it worth anything at all as compared with the look in Philippe Fabrèjol's eyes, and the great joy I felt when I was with him, and even the pain I had just endured. But I reverted also to those painful days passed

beside Fabien, with his obsession, his remorse, his distress. And I began to realise that that was worth it all.

It was worth it all to have drawn so profoundly near to his soul, and to have the desire, no, more than the desire, the actual and oppressive sense of helping him to bear the whole burden of his pain. It was worth it all to have believed that I could sometimes feel that his secret suffering sought to find its trembling refuge in me. That was worth everything! And my most precious hours of love had been lived in that little lodging when I was alone, while he was roaming at random through the town, and I fancied myself roaming miserably beside him. I had lived them when my pity insisted upon playing an active part, and I had begun to prepare my whole heart for the confession that he must make to me, and my whole strength to endure the expiation that we two must undertake. I had lived them in all the pains I had taken to draw him out of himself, and to give him courage to face life anew. And I still continued to live them, and I had truly spoken in accordance with the most sensitive and the most secret dictates of my heart when I said to Philippe Fabr  jol, "I am not suffering from solitude; I already have love."

Too constant and too deeply ingrained mediocrity had ended by repelling my affection, in spite

of me. Through all the years of our life together, my affection had vainly sought in Fabien something to which it could attach itself. And I thought then that it was essential for me to find in him some trace of nobility of soul. But nobility of soul is not the only thing that a woman can cherish. There is also suffering, provided it is great enough . . . great enough to absorb and hide all lesser, meaner sentiments.

The evening bells were ringing above Villeneuve and Avignon. The great light which had looked to me, on another evening, as though it emanated from the pale, rocky crests of the hills, from the dazzling peak of Mount Ventoux, did not flow down to-day into the mist-laden meadows. But I still carried it with me. I was no longer thinking of Philippe; I no longer felt unhappy. I had nothing further to wish for than what I was now feeling, for it was something better than happiness.

The evening bells were ringing on both sides of the Rhone, on the "Empire" side and on the "Kingdom" side, as the boatmen call them. Already the early November night was beginning to melt into the grey day. All at once these poignant emotions culminated in keen remorse as I remembered the room where Fabien was suffering, where he was waiting for me, where, to-day of all days, I had no business to leave him alone.

'And thinking solely of him, and realising fully that I had staked my whole life upon him, I hurried so fast on the way back, in my impatience and eagerness to reach him, that it did not take me ten minutes to get to the Rue des Trois-Faucons, that was so gloomy at night, without shops and lit only by one feeble lamp, at the corner of the Rue Petite-Fusterie.

CHAPTER XXI

I PICTURED him waiting for me in the dark, as he had done on that Sunday when once before I left him alone. I pictured his heavy slouching form silhouetted against the lighter square of the window. But no sooner had I crossed the threshold than I discovered that a faint light from above shone down upon the stairs and hallway, and I was glad that he had had the courage to light the lamp. He must have left the room door open, so as to hear the better, for he called down at once:

“Come up quick!”

I ascended the stairs at a run.

The lamp was indeed lighted and filled the room, but he had removed the lamp-shade, and in that bare, and disagreeable glare, his face stood out, a little red, and all glistening and puffed up with feverish satisfaction which kept his features twitching and contracting. On the table was an open valise, and our little trunk with its grey canvas cover occupied the place of the commode from Arles, which had been shoved in front of the window.

“You see,” said Fabien, “I began at once to

get everything ready. Fardier's letter came an hour ago. It is all over. To-morrow we go back to Lagarde."

I murmured in my stupefaction:

"What is all over?"

"The endless bore of having to stay here!" he exclaimed. "You must have had your fill of it too, haven't you? And how do you suppose I feel? Well, it's all settled now,—think of that! All settled finely. It's even better than I dared hope . . . although after all . . ."

The words crowded so rapidly to his lips that he found it impossible to utter all of them. He began to stammer, half laughing, and was forced to interrupt himself after each sentence, in order to draw a deep breath. And as I faced this man, so altered from the anxious, harassed, hopeless creature I had left so short a time ago, I felt as though I must have made a mistake in the dark street, opened some other door, entered some other house.

"What is the matter with you? It is exasperating to see you standing there like that! Why don't you sit down and let me tell you about it? There, that's better. . . . It's great news, I tell you, far better than I dared to hope for. But after all, it's no more than I deserve. After such hard luck, after being hoodooed. . . ."

"Hoodooed?"

"By that Landargues," he answered, "who stupidly let himself die on my hands. I forbade you even to mention it . . . it exasperated me too much! But all the same, you can't by any chance have forgotten about it?"

And in his contentment he began to laugh, as though he had just asked a most amusing question.

"No . . . oh! no."

"Come," said he, seating himself on the edge of the trunk, and then at once springing up again in his excitement. "I must quiet down a little and then I am going to tell you all about it. For now, you understand, it's all the same to me whether I talk of it or not; indeed, I am rather glad to, since everything has turned out to my best advantage. But how I have suffered! Ah! it has been funny, I assure you!"

He shook his head and breathed forth an interminable sigh between his half parted lips.

"You have suffered . . ."

These few minutes had sufficed. The vision of his suffering had been driven so far from me by that contrast of so much forced gaiety that I could not conjure it back.

"You have suffered . . . Why?"

"Well, that is a good one!" he exclaimed, and once more exploded with laughter.

"Oh, yes, of course! Landargues might have been saved but you were unable . . ."

"On the contrary, I did everything that was necessary," he asserted, "everything! I am perfectly sure of that. It was Fardier who took it into his head to maintain the contrary. . . . Ah! That scene! But I no longer hold him a grudge . . . since . . ."

"What scene?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said he, for he no longer shrank from recalling any of these details since the whole affair was ending so happily — "to the best of my interests," as he put it.

He had resumed his seat on the edge of the trunk; and he began his account with great animation. The crude light of the unshaded lamp projected a sharp shadow of him, and his eager gestures fluttered like huge night moths across our corner of the ceiling.

"You realised, of course, how pleased I must have been in the first place at the stroke of good luck that at last took me to the Landargues."

"You were pleased!"

"Naturally," he returned. "Yes, I know . . . there was all that silly talk of François' about you and me, but what of it? It was evident enough that it had annoyed me, had more than annoyed me, as you very well saw. But I assure you that from the moment I was sent for, I gave scarcely any further thought to it. I was overwhelmed by the suddenness of the surprise, and I kept think-

ing, 'That good old de Buires! It was certainly fine of him to send for me in place of Mandel.' And I also thought, 'The first thing I'll do is to hold out my hand to Landargues . . . I'll be very friendly . . . I will act as though I had heard nothing of his gossip. That will be my best course.' But by the time I got there he was already unconscious, and I saw right away that he was in a very bad state. Oh, I wasn't at all prepared to find him so ill. It rather upset me, naturally. But in spite of that I didn't lose my head. I did what was necessary, . . . everything that was necessary. Romain de Buires was there . . . and two servants. They all know how hard I worked. But he didn't get any better, quite the reverse. I began to see that he couldn't pull through. And on top of it all, just as it was turning to broad daylight, who should walk in but Fardier! He had been detained the greater part of the night by a patient down on the Islands.

"He examined Landargues, who was dying, sent every one out of the room and began questioning me. And then, speaking in a low tone to be sure, but quite too loud all the same, he started saying things to me, . . . very hard things . . . how I ought to have done this and how I ought to have done that . . . and that perhaps if I had, he could have been saved. All this that I am telling you was his opinion, it wasn't mine. But any-

way he said it was all the same; and since — since he is a much older man than I, as you know, I couldn't make much of an answer. So I tolerated all his foolishness, and since I was the only person, thank heaven! to hear it, I gave it little importance. But all at once it occurred to me that Fardier might go around through the whole town repeating what he had said, and then I simply went all to pieces, I hadn't any fight left in me. I came back to the house half crazy. I tried to think; but I was expecting all the time that crowds would be collecting and knocking at my door, to get a look at me and laugh in my face. So I left the house and ran away in my car, and kept going on and on, in spite of the storm. I never wanted to come back . . . I never wanted to see anybody from Lagarde again. To think that such a disaster should have happened to me! Only think of it! To a man like me!"

"Yes . . . to a man like you!"

"Yes, that's how I felt! It was a humiliation that I could not endure. I passed an atrocious night; I kept telling myself all the time, 'If I had only had the luck to have this happen with some fool of a peasant whom nobody knows, up on a mountain farm!' With people like that, if one makes a mistake,— I hadn't made any, myself, you understand — I only said *if*,— one comforts oneself by saying, 'Next time I shall act differ-

ently; this mishap will help me with the next case.' And that is all; one thinks no more about it. But with François Landargues! Why, the whole neighbourhood could think of nothing but his death! They talked and they discussed and they whispered! And there was Fardier . . . one single word from Fardier could lend the word of authority to every one of their idiotic suppositions. Oh! What a night! I went mad, I tell you, absolutely mad. In the morning my mind was made up. I decided to go away for a while, to take myself off as I did the night before through the storm, to some place where I should see nobody from Lagarde, where I should not have to hear people saying, 'And how about poor M. Landargues?' Oh, that, you see, that I couldn't have borne. Just afterwards Fardier arrived. I supposed that he meant to apologise . . . but he didn't go as far as that . . . no, he merely asked me for a few more details regarding the death. . .

"I began to give them to him, and then, all at once, I told him: 'Anyhow, I am going away. . . . I prefer to go away.' 'Why, what for?' But it would have been hard to admit to him that I was afraid of what he might say about me. So I only said that I was all upset by the whole affair, that I was downright sick, and I assure you I was not lying. He told me several times that this was not the moment to go away, that it was

wiser to stay there. But I wouldn't listen to any further argument. Then I think that he really began to feel sorry for me, he spoke less harshly. He told me, 'You have no unpleasantness to fear, . . . but since you are absolutely bent upon going, then go. And take your wife with you. That will be better, since we can say that you are ill.' I hardly dared to ask you to go with me — do you remember? — I was afraid you would laugh at me, like everybody else. But at last you made up your mind, and we came away."

"We came away."

The shadows of all his gestures continued to set huge wings flapping at one corner of the ceiling.

"The terrible part of it," he continued after a brief silence, "was the first days after we arrived here. I had come away of my own free will, and I had the feeling that I had been driven out . . . driven from my own country, driven from my own town. It seemed to me that back there everybody was talking of me alone, everybody was sneering when they thought of me. Oh! it was horrible! Even you . . . I could hardly bear to look at you. I expected all the time that you were going to ask me what had happened — just as Fardier did — and it didn't concern you . . . it didn't concern anybody, because I had done everything that I could do — I mean everything that needed to be done. Luckily you knew

how to keep quiet, and not to talk to me of anything — anything at all, I wouldn't have it. Oh! those days, those walks, with that idea all the time, that one idea: 'What are the people back yonder thinking of me? What are they saying about me?' "

"Only that one idea?"

"Naturally, what else would you expect me to think about? I could hear the whisperings, the sneering laughter. I could hear them say: 'Oh! Oh! A famous doctor, that Dr. Gourdon!' And I kept repeating to myself, 'To think of me having to stand for all that, me! A man like me?' Even here when I was in the street, it was stupid, but I was suspicious of everybody who looked at me. It seemed to me that they all of them had been talking with Fardier. And, by the way, the day when I met Fabr  jol I was pleased at first — but when the time came to go to his house, you yourself saw that it was impossible for me. He has acquaintances at Lagarde and I got it into my head that he had received letters from there, and that he was going to ask me a lot of questions, pretending that he didn't really know the facts — just to amuse himself, and see how I would take it. It was torture, I tell you. And you understood how I felt."

"I don't think I understood as well as I should."

"Oh, yes, you did, you understood. And you were very nice about it. In the end you succeeded in distracting my attention a little. You forced me to think of other things. I was dreadfully bored when you were not there. But all the same that wasn't enough to satisfy me. I found that the time dragged. So I made up my mind to write to Fardier, but oh, how afraid I was of his reply, how afraid. And you saw all that too."

"I saw all that too."

"Well!" he cried, springing to his feet with one bound and full of triumph, "the reply has come and I am going to read it to you. But the best part of it lies between the lines. Fardier says: 'I was just on the point of writing to you. I hope that by this time you are calmer. Come back to us quickly. Your absence is a blunder. It has greatly annoyed M. de Buire.' And do you know what all that means? — it means: 'I am nothing but an old idiot!' Evidently he has not gone around chattering through the whole district; now that I am calmer and quite happy I realise that such a thing would have been quite impossible. But all the same . . . all the same . . . somebody might have heard what he said to me . . . some servant . . . just one word, it needed just one word, not necessarily heard but merely guessed at. And now Romain de Buire is annoyed, very much annoyed, that there has

been any doubt about the excellence of the doctor whom he himself summoned to attend the man of whom he was the sole heir. He won't stand for anything of that kind. I can see through things, let me tell you. I have learned how to use my eyes, and I read a great deal more than has been put down on the paper, when Fardier writes: 'You will receive the best possible welcome. M. de Buire and I are constantly speaking of you in the highest terms.' Isn't that great? And he says besides . . . just listen to this, it's the best of all! He says . . ."

He went closer to the lamp and unfolded the letter. Bending down toward the light, he sought feverishly for the phrases, one after the other; and the paper wavered and rustled between his hands which were trembling with pleasure:

"He says besides: 'I am growing old; you could begin to help me with some of my practice.' After that, you see, taken with the proof of confidence which he shows me, and which de Buire no doubt requested, perhaps insisted on, no one will dare to say anything. So that's how it is! It won't be Mandel who succeeds to Fardier's practice, it will be myself! "

Holding the letter spread out in his left hand, he struck it so forcefully that the paper split apart.

"All things considered, it turns out that he

rendered me an excellent service by dying as he did, that excellent Landargues! ”

And he repeated:

“ Successor to Fardier! ”

He was silent for a moment enjoying the full flavour of a happiness he could scarcely contain, the most glorious happiness of which he could personally conceive. But he was already adjusting himself to it. The radiance of his first surprise was fading from his features. He thought a little longer, then with grave importance he said indifferently:

“ After all it is only what was to be expected.”

And he added, for the third time:

“ A man like me! ”

Wholly absorbed in himself he had seen nothing but himself all the time that he was talking to me. But as he gradually calmed down he at last looked at me for the first time since I had come into the room.

“ What is the matter with you? ” he demanded in surprise. “ One would say . . . ”

But filled with panic at the thought of what he might be about to observe, I hastened to interrupt him:

“ There is nothing the matter with me. . . . I am feeling just as you are, just glad.”

And I judged it necessary to repeat, to assert more emphatically:

"Very, very glad!"

"I should think you might be," he retorted.

"You would be hard to please if you weren't."

And he began once more pacing up and down, turning on his heel, pushing back a chair, noisily opening the door of the adjoining room. And all the time he was shaken by a constant laugh of sheer satisfaction, that did not part his lips, but that kept the thread-bare and stained revers of the old waistcoat that he wore in the house, ceaselessly dancing up and down on his breast. Having said all there was to say he now sought some new way of working off his exuberance; for his joy was of that coarse kind that demands some outward manifestation. At last he stopped in the middle of the room, though for a moment, with his hands in his pockets, and all at once:

"Quick," said he, "change your dress. We are going to dine out, and we are going to dine well."

"Oh! No!" I besought him, "No! Let us stay here."

But even before he had time to formulate his astonished "why?" within the space of one clear-cut and terrible second, I had visualised what the evening in that room would be; I had imagined the two of us there alone; I had heard the conversation down to our slightest words: those of Fabien repeating himself tirelessly, and my own, limited

to the replies that he would expect of me. And I sprang sharply to my feet.

"Yes, you are right, it would be an excellent idea, let us go at once. I will get ready. . . ."

But my first refusal, which had visibly perplexed him continued to remain uppermost in his mind. He came nearer to me and examined me more closely: and I could have cursed that shadeless lamp, that light which flared with pitiless violence, and showed me only too plainly his features convulsed with an excess of vulgar happiness, and must with equal clearness have shown him mine. He continued to look at me, and he repeated:

"Why in the world did you say no in the first place? And why do you look so queer . . . so woe-begone? At a time like this! It's astounding!"

That was true enough, why should I look woe-begone? And why was it that my apparent sadness was nothing at all, in comparison with the real sadness that pierced me through and through, and the bitterness that gathered and forced itself drop by drop to the inmost depths of my heart, like successive waves of venom? Why? Was it because I now had the certainty that my husband was not an assassin? For that was the reason . . . that was the only reason. . . . I no longer quite knew what my fears could have been . . . or my hopes either! I no longer knew

whether my life had been fed for several weeks on imaginary absurdities, or on the most profound and poignant of emotional realities. Only the bare fact was revealed to me with all its evidence, as brutal and as naked as the light of that lamp; and my pain in the face of it could be nothing less than grotesque or monstrous. I had understood . . . it was no longer possible for me to fail to understand. And seeking protection against myself and against the alarming emotions that I was feeling, I cried out:

"Sad! I sad? . . . after what you have just told me! Sad! Well, of all things!"

And here, suddenly, I began to laugh. It was a terrible, violent laugh that nothing could check. I laughed at Fabien and at his complacent face. I laughed still harder at myself and my grand emotions. And this laughter, which shook my shoulders convulsively, forced scorching tears up into my eyes, while a spasm of sobs strangled my throat with a hard and painful knot.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Fabien, quite radiant. 'Do you know, I was just the same at first. The good news seemed to numb me. I didn't really take it in for the first few moments. But when I did, good Lord, I went almost crazy. Just like you, you know, absolutely like you!"

CHAPTER XXII

I NO longer remember the name of the restaurant to which we went through obscure little streets, nor all that Fabien told me of its ancient renown, and of the important personages of the city who were in the habit of frequenting it. But I remember clearly our going into the big, low hall, hot and crowded, the loud noise of voices and of plates, and the odour of food mingled with the sour smell of dishes dressed with vinegar, the reek of frying oil and the heavy fumes of roasting poultry. I remember the floating vapour, made up of the mingled exhalations of the food and the human breath, a vapour that dimmed the great wall mirrors, framed with painted garlands, with young women with their hair beribboned in the Provençal style, and that obscured alike the faces of the decorations, with their crude colourings, and the living faces aglow with feverish excitement. And I recall the pains that Fabien took to choose a table that would place us prominently in the very centre of the room.

He called the waiter; he gave him his orders in

quite a loud tone, pleased to see that most of the other diners turned to look at him; and the glance that he allowed to travel over every one as he took his seat, was a glance of triumph. At that moment he was even happier than he had found it possible to be when he received Fardier's letter, happier even than he was just now when he told me his whole story, breathless with excitement and joy. Actually he looked like a man who had undergone a resurrection. He seemed to be expanding visibly from minute to minute. He was taking his revenge for all those weeks during which he had lived shrinking, hiding, dying of shame and fear, imagining himself surrounded by the sneers and mockery of other men; he was taking it superbly and without stint, almost insolently.

I had seated myself so that my back was turned towards the room. Among all the faces surrounding us, I saw before me only Fabien's face; among all the gestures that were being made, I saw only his gestures. Every one of them expressed pride, absolute satisfaction, contemptible and deep-seated self-sufficiency. The manner in which he helped himself to bread, drew the salt-cellar towards him or set his glass solidly upon the table, revealed, it seemed to me, better than any words could do, of what coarse stuff his happiness was made. . . . And I realised that it was the

selfsame stuff from which his despair had been cut and fashioned, that despair that I had watched over, and upon which I had sustained the best and most exalted days of my life, through all those hours that I had believed so fine!

I began now to recall those hours. I did no more than begin. . . . In that noisy and heated room, with the air heavy with unpleasant odours, I relived one by one those hours of torture and anguish, so dreaded at first and that gradually had become so dear. . . . I had before me only Fabien's face, but when he turned his head or thrust it forward, as he was constantly doing in his excitement, another face appeared in the narrow mirror, engraved with opaque stars, that decorated the octagonal pillar behind him — a pale face, with eyes a little dilated and fixed. Those eyes, which were my own, were also so like Mamma's eyes that I felt as though I was seeing them once again. Those eyes contained my entire life, they explained it all. They were at once eager and resigned, imperious and timid. And I had never seen so clearly until to-night that their submissive humility was mingled with an infinite perturbation, and that they were filled at the same time with the narrowest of scruples, and the most restless desires.

Fabien's head, ceaselessly moving and turning, hid these eyes from me momentarily, and then I

would see them reappear confusedly in the surface of the mirror dimmed by smoke and vapour. And what lived in them now was not these recent weeks, neither was it the few latest hours of my existence. It was a very short space of time, yet vastly longer than all the rest of the days that I have drawn my breath on earth. I remembered — I kept on remembering — that night at Lagarde! Oh! the horror of that night! Mysteriously controlling my actions and dictating my words, yet scarcely realised by myself, there had been my sudden resolution not to abandon Fabien, my determination to go with him. There had been — Ah! but there had been so many things all leading just one way! And now one single thought tortured me: the memory, among all those other memories, of one single minute: the minute when, in the presence of that suffering which had seemed to me so great, so absolute, so abundantly capable of ennobling with its tortures the most debased of souls, love had been marvellously born of pity. And now the only thing left me in place of it was the revelation that his soul had not changed, the certainty that it was incapable of change. I had only that, nothing but that.

“ Ah! perhaps I would rather have had him kill him — really kill him, sooner than have things as they are! ”

At that moment Fabien straightened up, and I no longer saw my eyes in the glass; I no longer had before me any glance but his own, a little vague and brimming over with excitement and pleasure.

"Waiter!" he called. He flung his order to him before the waiter had time to reach his side. "Châteauneuf-des-Papes, a good bottle." He leaned toward me, facetious and confidential:

"It's going to cost me dear, this little dinner, but so long as they'll have to pay for it . . ."

"Who are *they*?" I asked.

"Papa Fardier's patients," he answered. "Have you just waked up? For the last half hour we've been talking of nothing else."

He said "we have been talking" without noticing that, except for that one brief question, I had not yet uttered a single word. My preoccupation which he thought was momentary, amused him vastly. He helped himself a second time to the quail which had been set before us with their lustrous little black feet sedately tucked beneath them on the savoury slices of toast. And he resumed the monologue to which I had not been listening. Incessantly talking and eating with equal abundance, he was also incessantly leaning forward to right or left, straightening up, bending down and watching to see who were looking at him. All the time I kept seeing, in the glass behind him, those

eyes that were watching me, and in utter bewilderment I continued to question and answer them.

"Would it not have been better, if he had killed . . . really killed him? Which is more debasing to a human soul, the passionate act of a single moment which may be expiated by long repentance, or a dull, unbroken life of mediocrity and platitude?"

But as surely as I saw Fabien cutting his meat and helping himself to the red wine, I now saw that even if he had committed such a crime, the anxiety, the repentance and the fears it would have awakened would have been no greater than his own small soul. With a sudden desperate desire to get away from him and myself I averted my head, less from the two faces confronting me than from the secret and unbearably perturbing souls behind them; and in my turn I began to gaze around the room and try to fix my whole attention on a young woman's fantastic hat; on remarks made by our neighbours, two couples from Brazil speaking a most curious French; on the movements of the waiters, gliding nimbly between the close ranks of tables; on the plump brunette cashier, who looked vastly bored behind her high desk bright with roses. I busied myself listening to the faint tinkle of money falling into metal trays, and from the adjoining room, where three billiard tables flaunted their bright green expanse

under the flaring lamp, I could hear the light click of the ivory balls, the voices of the players announcing their scores, and sometimes raised in hot argument over a questionable run or in praise of a difficult shot.

And one of these moments when I welcomed anything that would help me escape from myself, I once again glanced around to the farthest point my eyes could reach, the room where the billiard players were passing back and forth; and there, just coming through the doorway, with his hat on his head, and buttoning his overcoat preparatory to leaving, I saw a man, a tall, robust, elderly man, whose kindly face radiated good humour, beneath his bushy head of white hair. Suddenly I recognised him . . . Thereupon I leaned toward Fabien, and all at once I began to reply to everything that he said, asking him for little details, discussing with feverish animation all the questions that interested him. I felt that I must for the moment hold his attention and keep his eyes fixed upon me, for I was determined that he should not see that man and recognise him,—I was determined he should not. But Fabien took no more heed of my sudden interest than he had previously been disturbed by my indifference. And notwithstanding my urgent questions, my face bent forward towards him, my eyes seeking

to hold his eyes, he continued to turn in all directions, just as he had been doing all along, and inevitably he ended by turning in the direction of that white-haired man.

At once a deeper colour overspread his already flushed face. He gave an exclamation, pounded joyously on the table and called in a loud voice over the heads of the other diners:

“ Fabréjol ! ”

I saw M. Fabréjol give a little start of surprise, I saw his glance travel from table to table, seeking in his astonishment to discover who could have hailed him like that, and I saw that his smile was perhaps not wholly cordial when, on perceiving Fabien, who was standing up and making conspicuous gestures, he made up his mind to come and join us. My husband at once ordered liqueurs to be brought, disarranged our neighbours in order that an extra chair could be placed between their table and ours, called back the waiter to ask for cigarettes, and altogether attracted so much general attention that M. Fabréjol seemed to me a little uncomfortable.

“ But I beg of you,” he kept repeating, “ don’t give yourself so much trouble,— don’t disturb everybody like that.”

“ That’s all right,” answered Fabien, “ that’s all right ! Ah ! my friend, my dear friend, how

glad I am to see you again! What luck to run across you like this! Because, you see, as it happens, we are leaving Avignon to-morrow."

M. Fabr  jol had greeted me with the same friendly cordiality, the same affectionate, almost paternal kindness that he had already shown me in his own home. And he was about to talk to me, but Fabien gave him no chance.

"Yes, indeed," he continued, "to-morrow. I did not expect to start so suddenly, but what else can I do? My patients call me back,—and my colleagues too. It would almost seem as though no one could live in Lagarde any longer — or die, for that matter," he added facetiously, "unless I am there. So I am starting back, I am sacrificing my health, my repose,— I simply have to."

"Your health, apparently, is better now," remarked M. Fabr  jol.

"Better?" declared Fabien, "Oh! Assuredly, and I may even say, to-day, altogether restored. It is very different from the day I met you, Fabr  jol — admit, my friend, that I was a frightful object to look at! — and quite different from that other day when, to my great regret, I was unable to accompany my wife to your luncheon. Ah! I was truly very ill . . . But that is over, quite over. Have a chartreuse, Fabr  jol, or a cognac?"

Never before had he talked so familiarly to M.

Fabréjol. Even when we were by ourselves and he talked of him to me, he did so with more deference. But to-day he was in such a magnificent mood, that he was quite lifted out of himself, and I really believe that he could not have conceived of any one in the entire world whose equal he would not have claimed to be.

"Try both," he added, uncorking the bottles that contained the two liqueurs, "and I will keep you company."

"Neither the one nor the other," said M. Fabréjol, covering his glass with his hand. "I thank you, no. In any case, I shall be obliged to leave you now. It is quite late. I have six kilometres to go to reach my home. An old horse . . . an old coachman. And my sister is anxious and sits up for me. But I felt that I had to spend this evening taking leave of a few friends."

"Oh, come now!" exclaimed Fabien, "you are not preparing to leave France already? Why, I was counting on asking you down to visit us some day soon at Lagarde!"

He uttered these last words quite unaffectedly. At one draught he emptied the glass that he had filled with chartreuse. And then he felt impelled to add, in an impressive and confidential tone:

"My position down yonder, you must know, is in the way of becoming considerably more important!"

He repeated, pounding on the table with his open palm, as though to drive the words home into the marble itself:

"Considerably more!"

"I do not doubt it," said M. Fabr  jol politely. "I always supposed that it would come to that. And I congratulate you quite sincerely."

So far as it was possible for me to notice anything at that moment, I noticed that he seemed surprised at Fabien's tone this evening, and possibly slightly annoyed at it. He turned and addressed himself to me as he added:

"I have retained a most agreeable impression of Lagarde. And it would give me great pleasure, my dear lady, to pay you another visit there. Unfortunately, I must repeat, I am leaving France, or rather both of us, my son and myself, are leaving."

I bent my head in reply, I even believe that I smiled. I had begun to tremble when I first discovered the presence of M. Fabr  jol, and had hoped that he would not see us, or at least would not come over and join us. But now I could not have told what I had been afraid of; I could no longer visualise the son who was to leave with him; I felt no pain as I heard him say so.

"Philippe," continued M. Fabr  jol, "has been a little undecided. He had, I believe, some intention of extending his stay in France for a month

or two longer. And his aunt, my poor old sister, would have been very glad to have him. But you know how it is with young people. He has changed his mind. And only a little while ago, this evening, he told me that his mind was now made up and that he preferred to accompany me."

"When do you leave?" asked Fabien. •

"On the twelfth," answered M. Fabr  jol.

"The twelfth," repeated my husband in a mechanical fashion.

It was that little word that brought it all back to me. Thanks to that date, which Philippe had mentioned in the Calvet Museum, and which I had then repeated, just as Fabien had done just now, I again saw in memory the Museum and Philippe standing there in front of me. I again heard his request and my refusal. I heard my own voice, low and earnest, saying, "I already have love." And here once again, just as a little earlier in the Rue des Trois-Faucons, in the abominable glare of the bedroom lit by the unshaded lamp, I burst out laughing. And just as before, it was a terrible, convulsive laugh, that shook my shoulders continuously, and forced burning tears into my eyes, while a spasm of sobs tied a hard and painful knot in my throat.

M. Fabr  jol stared at me in amazement, but Fabien explained with vast indulgence:

"She is in such high spirits!"—and I had a

sharp conviction that each one of his words would be repeated to Philippe, and each one of his words cut into me like sharp, cold steel,—“it is because to-day has been a very lucky day for her!”

*

* *

Above the roof of red tiles that I saw from my window, the smoke is struggling to rise, but is beaten down by a strong wind. It bubbles up as it leaves the blackened chimney like a feeble jet of water; it settles back, then mounts again; and since evening is approaching, it appears white against the grey sky.

We are in winter now. Christmas is drawing near. That is the time at Lagarde when people exchange calls. I have been very busy both making and receiving them. And I had to interrupt my writing often, so often that sometimes I really no longer knew why I had undertaken to set down all these things.

What was the good of doing it? At all events it's finished now. I have nothing more to tell. I lead a busy social life at present, as is natural. I give luncheons and sometimes dinner parties. Fabien's position requires me to perform these duties, which are by no means disagreeable. That last evening in Avignon which brought this account to a close, he had good reason to be content. Everything had turned out admirably.

Old Fardier has already begun to pass over to him the greater part of his practice. We see him quite often. He dines here to-morrow with Romain de Buire, who is now included among our real friends.

Naturally nothing will be said, I mean nothing will be said of all this past history. It is never spoken of now. Besides it is an old story; a year old already. No one ever thinks of it now. Even I often imagine that I myself have forgotten it.

Sometimes, however . . . yes, sometimes . . . I remember. It comes upon me all at once, suddenly, and without warning, and takes me by surprise. It happens when I am alone in my bedroom, or perhaps when I am sitting with Guicharde sewing before the fire; or again, and this is the most curious, when I am paying some important call, in the middle of a conversation, when I am trying to look especially modish and full of satisfied pride in my new hat with the brown feather direct from Paris, or my elbow gloves with heavy black stitching in the latest fashion. Then I remember.

It seems as though all of a sudden my heart awakens and protests; it seems to swell until it tortures me. My throat contracts. I find myself at a loss for words. My hands turn rather cold. And if I have a mirror before me, I

straightway see the same eyes raised towards me that once gazed at me through a whole evening, from the depths of a dim mirror engraved with opaque stars, those resigned eyes that were nevertheless filled with perturbed desires.

But those distressing moments are quite rare now. Perhaps they are going to become more and more so. Life moves on and life commands. I was always trained to obedience, and I merely continue as I was trained. I accept what life chooses to make of my submissive being. I smile at the aspect of the face she turns to me. Yes, I smile . . . I am happy. Why not? The consideration that is paid us by the whole community increases steadily. Every day my husband makes more money, and the affection that he shows me is tranquil and faithful. Guicharde is right. We must not look beyond the outer surface of things; so long as that is excellent, it is useless and perhaps ridiculous to search for anything deeper.

It is finished. I am going to make a big fire with all these pages. Evening has come. The women in the street are on their way to the fountain. I hear the creaking of the pump, the vibrant sound of a handle dropping against the side of an empty bucket. And I hear below me all the sounds of my own household: Guicharde is briskly setting the table, Adélaïde is splitting wood

in the scullery. Presently Fabien will come home in his low, grey car that looks like some huge beetle that has been burrowing in the dust.

Life is regular, abundant and tranquil. All things considered, it has been good to me, very good. I am happy; I have reason to be. I would be altogether so, if it were not still for those moments, those many moments, when I seem to awaken, and then I think that my peaceful and contented minutes are perhaps the worst of all.

THE END

Printed in Great Britain: by
UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED
WOKING AND LONDON

